

**SUSTAINABLE APPROPRIATION:
CONSUMPTION, ADVERTISING, AND THE (ANTI-) POLITICS OF (POST-)
ENVIRONMENTALISM**

by

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B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2011

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

June 2013

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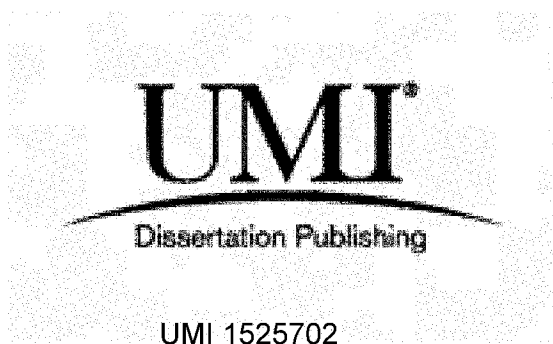
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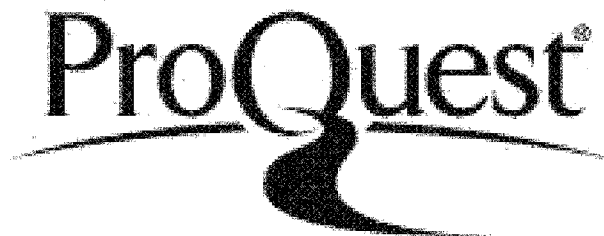
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ABSTRACT

This thesis extends ecocritical thought into the sphere of popular culture, particularly televised and online advertisements, by examining the ways in which environmentalist discourse is appropriated and obfuscated by corporations for promotional purposes. Moreover, it argues that such an appropriation, which paradoxically utilizes environmentalist discourse to promote consumption, is a manifestation of post-environmentalism, a term derived from a critical synthesis of Angela McRobbie's notion of post-feminism and Slavoj Žižek's extended discussions of "eco-capitalism." The critical term functions as a way of semantically differentiating between environmentalism and its co-opted counterpart. Ultimately, through analysis of advertising and promotional campaigns from major corporations, I argue that this trend of appropriation threatens environmentalism as a radical politics by conceptually and literally relegating environmentalist activism to spheres of consumerism and through acts of consumption, which has larger ramifications for all hegemony-challenging, radical politics.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For a project like this, it is incredibly difficult to exhaustively provide acknowledgement or credit where it is due. Every individual I have interacted with in the past two years has in *some way* contributed to this project, so if I have missed you, I apologize.

I would like to firstly thank Dr. Maryna Romanets, my supervisor, for providing extensive and detailed feedback that ultimately made this work much stronger, and for instructing some of the most interesting courses that I took throughout this degree. I'd also like to thank Dr. Kevin Hutchings for his invaluable feedback and guidance, as well as Dr. Angèle Smith, whose keen eyes also helped tighten up this project. In terms of my growth as an instructor, I'd like to thank to Dr. Lisa Dickson for encouraging me to confront lecturing in my first semester as a TA, and for her continued feedback and support.

On a more personal level, I'd also like to extend my appreciation to my family: to Paul and Darcy, my parents, for putting up with me these past couple years and the years before that; to Zak and Nyle, my brothers, for their support; and to my Grandpa, Roger, who made this furthering of my education possible. A special thanks to Matt Partyka—without his friendship, encouragement, solidarity, and frequent (mostly valid) criticism, I doubt I would have got to where I am today as smoothly as I have. Thanks to the friends who often dragged me away from the books for the sake of my sanity, and whose company has always been refreshing throughout the year(s): Chris Bergestad, Alex Buck, Pete Glomlein, Andy Johnson, GP Lainsbury, Barry McKinnon, Graham Pearce and everyone else (you know who you are). Thanks to CeCe for providing me with mostly welcomed distractions this past year. Lastly, and most significantly, I'd like to thank Allisa, my partner, for *always* being there for me, even when the project got the better of me; at least now you're prepared to support me through a PhD.

Introduction

Theorizing Post-Environmentalism: Ecocriticism, Cultural Politics, and Postmodern Capitalism

The perceived role of cultural or critical theory, particularly poststructuralism, in the tradition of ecocriticism continues to be hotly debated; from these debates, two camps are clearly identifiable—those who are expressly *resistant* to implementing theory and those who encourage the interaction between ecocriticism as such with broader critical theory in their own practices. What is apparent in these two opposing positions is that ecocritics who call for an explicit discourse between critical theory and ecocriticism, such as Greg Garrard, Kevin Hutchings, Timothy Morton, Susie O'Brien, and Anthony Vital are on the rise. Because of this tumultuous relationship between ecocriticism and critical theory, which is largely the result of early ecocritics' continued resistance to an interaction with broader critical theory,¹ there are few works that examine the role and representation of "nature" in popular culture—a field that is explicitly dominated through advertising by hegemonic forces such as neoliberalism. This thesis, then, breaks from conventional, theory-resistant ecocriticism; it applies approaches from the field of cultural studies, consumption studies, and popular culture studies to formulate an explicitly political ecocritical approach that engages in a discourse analysis of contemporary advertisements that co-opt the discourse of environmentalism and ecological thought. It argues that this appropriation of environmentalist perspectives by contemporary capitalist discourse obscures and overrides environmentalism as a potentially radical, hegemony-challenging ideology, thereby nullifying its political potential and, ironically, utilizing its discourse in a paradoxical

¹ For an extensive and fruitful discussion of the historical and contemporary relationship between ecocriticism and critical theory, see Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby's introduction to the edited collection of essays *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*.

manner—to promote consumption. I label this phenomenon post-environmentalism. In an effort to expand on ecological critique's political potential and contribute to strands of ecocriticism that seek to integrate broader critical theory into their practice, this study draws on the works of such contemporary cultural critics as Slavoj Žižek and Angela McRobbie. It synthesizes Žižek's political approaches with McRobbie's gender theories dialectically in order to illuminate the way in which capitalism appropriates its counter-discourse to justify itself as an ideology. It focuses on the appropriation of environmental discourse in advertisements that promote household commodities, automobiles, and oil from the Alberta tar sands—examining commodities that are increasingly more anti-environmental as the chapters move forward—illustrating that contemporary capitalism blurs the line between environmental activist and consumer, thereby obscuring and voiding the political basis for environmentalism as a hegemony-challenging ideology.

Contemporary environmentalism as a socio-political movement is generally considered to have begun as recently as 1962 with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book that largely deals with the use and production of pesticides and their environmental impact.² It is no surprise, then, that ecocritical literary theory and ecologically focused philosophy³ are likewise relatively new trends in the context of broader contemporary critical and literary theory. Arguably, among other factors, it is this “youth” as a critical field that provides the foundations for critiques of ecocriticism that label it as politically ambiguous; scholars such as Murray Bookchin accuse the literary and philosophical “eco” movements of being needlessly eclectic and as a result apolitical (*Social*

² In his 2004 book—*Ecocriticism*—Greg Garrard states that “[i]t is generally agreed that modern environmentalism begins with ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’, in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962)” (1).

³ Some scholars, like Murray Bookchin, refer to this trend in philosophy as “ecophilosophy” (*Social Ecology* 97).

Ecology 97-101).⁴ This eclectic nature is evidenced in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).

Despite its age, *The Reader* is still considered a foundational ecocritical text and is consistently referenced in recent ecocritical work. Indeed, the questions that frame the trajectory of the project of *The Ecocriticism Reader* speak to this ambiguity. Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of the ecocritical approach as an "earth-centered" one contains a set of assumptions that remain unclear. The questions that the *Reader* addresses are outlined by Glotfelty in her introduction as follows:

What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? *How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?* How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? *In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category?* [...] In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? ("Introduction" xix, emphasis added)

The italicized questions do mark a consistent political trajectory—identity politics, questions about humanity's possibly destructive relationship with "nature," and the role that hegemonic institutions and ideologies play in a possibly destructive relationship with "nature"—but they beg to be narrowed with qualifiers such as *why*, *how*, and *what* are the *socio-political implications* of such questions. However, within Glotfelty's summation of ecocriticism's

⁴ Of course, the general interdisciplinary nature of ecocritical approach is well acknowledged by those involved in it—Glotfelty even focuses a section of her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* on discussing the various forms of ecology-based theory, ranging from ecological anthropology to ecology-based theology (xxi-xxii). This suggests that there is a tension between the expressed interdisciplinary openness of ecocriticism and its early resistance to engagement with broader critical theory.

fundamental research questions is an implicit acknowledgement of ecocriticism's inherent critical openness and reliance on critical approaches outside of ecology proper.

More recently, a 2007 ecocriticism anthology entitled *Coming into Contact* has attempted to answer abstract ontological questions such as “who are we” and “where are we” (3-4) instead of qualifying such questions in a manner that narrows the focus of analysis. By focusing on abstractions like “who are we,” not only are the political implications of such an approach overshadowed, they seem nonexistent, not even subtly implied; *Coming into Contact* then suffers the same fate as *The Ecocriticism Reader*. It seems as though the common thread in both *The Ecocriticism Reader* and *Coming into Contact*—both pioneering texts in the field of ecocriticism—is an attempt to establish a critical theory that predominantly *challenges* how humans conceive of nature and to challenge a view that prioritizes “society” and “culture” over the natural world. This problematization is not without its merits and is arguably a necessary stepping stone for a critical movement to gain a solid foundation. An immediate effect of such a goal, however, is an ignoring of the hegemonic socio-economic systems and institutions that are the forerunners of the current environmental crises. A more recent text, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* from Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, provides a markedly more political approach to ecocriticism, a literary political ecology which acknowledges tensions and “internal divisions” within environmental studies and postcolonialism: “Internal divisions are constitutive of both fields, but these may easily be glossed over in broad-based attempts to find similarities” (2-3). In this sense, it is important to avoid painting all of ecocriticism with the same brush; clearly, as ecocriticism evolves, its trajectories will become clearer and more firmly established as dialogues and debates evolve the discourse.

Indeed, there are clear trends within ecocriticism that speak to the growing expressly political trajectories, including the sustained discourse with broader critical theory, which arguably provide the foundations for a more sophisticated analysis of contemporary ecological issues. While tensions between the use of theory and ecocriticism have been apparent since ecocriticism's inception, there is a noticeable rise in works that seek to address this tension by approaching ecocriticism from a perspective of critical theory, particularly from European ecocritics. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby's *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* begins with a discussion of John Parham's polemical article "The Poverty of Ecocritical Theory," which argues that ecocriticism has an antagonistic relationship with critical theory. Goodbody and Rigby, however, identify that "the alleged ecocritical antipathy to theory is on the wane" (1), citing Kevin Hutchings, Dana Phillips, and Timothy Morton as frontrunners in these critical developments. Speaking to these developments within ecocriticism, Serpil Opperman suggests an "ecocentric postmodern theory" that integrates a variety of modes of thought in an approach of transdisciplinary status which "radically integrates scientific, ecological, and postmodern views in order to constitute a new cognitive paradigm" (234). Opperman's conception here echoes those of other theorists and philosophers who seek to place environmentally focused discourse into the spheres of broader critical theory; indeed, "ecocentric postmodern theory" is simply a narrow, original phrase that Opperman proposes, but can be seen in parallel with many of the approaches discussed below.

Responding to some of the problematic threads in theory-resistant ecocriticism, some scholars employ approaches that seek to work against what they identify as the more ambiguous politics of what can be labeled as liberal ecocriticism, such as Lance Newman's

“Marxism and Ecocriticism” and Timothy Morton’s *Ecology without Nature*. In “Marxism and Ecocriticism,” after examining the political foundations of ecocriticism, Newman states that

At a time when it is becoming clear that environmental destruction is a feature of modern societies as pervasive and persistent as racial and sexual oppression, ecocriticism has begun a crucial expansion of the vibrant tradition of radical scholarship. But if the potential radicalism of ecocriticism is to be realized, the contradictions at its heart must be faced and worked out. (3, emphasis added)

Here, Newman identifies the existing tensions within the movement of ecocriticism; he acknowledges that, ultimately, ecocriticism is a *radical* school of thought, but such radicalism is not yet widely implemented in ecocritical scholarship. Continuing this thread, Newman states that “[e]cocriticism’s reluctance so far to recognize the social world as an active force in its tale of a solitary visionary walking in the woods reveals the incompleteness of its departure from the historiographical idealism of orthodox literary studies and cultural analysis” (10). Through this metaphor Newman argues that, despite its attempts to break from certain schools of thought and established ecocritical dogmas, ecocriticism has yet to successfully accomplish such a break. Moreover, Newman suggests that ecocriticism must tackle socio-capitalistic order: “the debates within which we replace any text should be analyzed not merely internally as discursive fields, but as ranges of response to specific conjunctures in the development of the capitalist ecosocial order” (19). Rather than isolate texts and approach them solely through their representations of nature, texts must be placed in and analyzed within a larger political context.

Following Newman, who seeks to disrupt internalized hierarchical concepts in ecocriticism, Timothy Morton argues in *Ecology without Nature* that the entire concept of “nature” as such constitutes a dichotomy that situates the idea of nature as always already marginalized in a relationship based on hierarchies. Such *de facto* marginalization as a result of the set of assumptions which construct “nature” remains largely unaddressed in much of the foundational ecocritical literature, including *The Ecocriticism Reader* and *Coming into Contact*. Morton effectively deconstructs the roots of and ideologies behind contemporary notions of the environment by ultimately calling for “ecology without nature.” As he puts it, “[s]trange as it may sound, the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art” (1, emphasis added). Morton implements this argument in an effort to destabilize binaristic views of nature and the human world.⁵ Indeed, Morton’s line of thought—a line of thought extended by Žižek—identifies one of the reasons why the above-mentioned ecocritical projects suffer from political ambiguity: if a conception of nature is always already problematic, is basing a critical approach on that conception not doubly problematic? However, questions can be raised as to how challenging Morton’s call for a radically different conception of “nature” *really* is. Noting this obfuscated state of nature, Morton states that “in all its confusing, ideological intensity, nature ironically impedes a proper relationship with the earth and its lifeforms, which would, of course,

⁵ In some ways, this challenging of the constructed binarism between nature and culture echoes Heidegger’s phenomenological notion of “being-in-the-world,” which is fundamental to his idea of Dasein. Heidegger states that “[t]he compound expression ‘being-in-the-world’ indicates, in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unified* phenomenon” (53). He continues: “But while being-in-the-world cannot be broken up into its components that may be pieced together, this does not prevent it from having a multiplicity of constitutive structural factors” (53). In this context, Heidegger’s concept destabilizes the binarism by illustrating that there is a level of fluidity in the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. Indeed, there is a tradition of using Heideggerian concepts like “being-in-the-world” in ecocriticism, but this usage is a point of contention for many scholars. While ecocritics such as Michael Zimmerman see Heidegger largely as an ecological theorist and the use of him as productive for ecocriticism, ecocritics like Greg Garrard challenge this viewpoint, pointing out that Heidegger’s pervasiveness in ecocriticism is ultimately problematic. See Greg Garrard’s “Heidegger Nazism Ecocriticism” for further elaboration on this complex issue.

include ethics and science” (2). On the one hand, Morton identifies a political ambiguity within ecocriticism, but on the other, his call for a reconceptualization of nature may well leave the structures that dominate nature unscathed because it eliminates a signifying domain (nature) that has hitherto been necessary in, for example, the identification of ecologically harmful practices. The concept of nature, then, is paradoxically necessary as well as unnecessary. Challenging conventional ecological literature, including ecocriticism, Morton states:

Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being. Due to the properties of the rhetoric that evokes the idea of a surrounding medium, ecological writing can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society. (5)

In many ways, Morton is identifying that much of conventional ecocriticism is built on certain assumptions—assumptions that he seeks to expose and problematize. I agree with Morton that much work in ecocriticism, particularly early ecocriticism, suffers from problematic assumptions as to what nature is and even what politics are. Paraphrasing Timothy Luke, Morton identifies a form of criticism that has emerged as *separate* from broader ecocriticism, *ecocritique*, which he states is used “to describe forms of left ecological criticism” (13). Adopting this notion of *ecocritique*, I attempt to formulate my own *ecocritique* through a synthesis of approaches developed by other critical theorists of the left. While there is a continuing tension between mainstream ecocriticism and those who seek, like Morton, to push the school of thought further, much ecological *philosophy* contains a clear political trajectory.

Recent eco-philosophers who explicitly attempt to expose and challenge those hegemonic structures include John Bellamy Foster and Graham Purchase. Both theorists attribute the exploitation of the natural world to capitalism quite overtly. Foster begins *Ecology Against Capitalism* by rather bluntly stating that “[t]he argument of this book is that the realms of ecology and capitalism are opposed to each other—not in every instance but in their interactions as a whole” (7). Foster’s point throughout the book, which essentially provides examples to prove the thesis of capitalism’s inability to reconcile with ecology, is that the hierarchical structures of capitalism and its inherent drive toward growth in the form of profits fundamentally undermine any conception of ecology or environmentalism. Part of this thesis’ aim is to expose contexts and situations that attempt to *suggest*—through mass media—that ecology and capitalism can (and do) work together harmoniously by identifying the instances where post-environmentalism is promoted as environmentalism. Following Foster’s thesis, Purchase states in his 2010 book *Anarchism and Ecology*:

Capitalism in theory and practise is so profoundly irresponsible and anti-ecological in its approach to industrial manufacture that it has not even had the dignity and foresight to minimize the dangers of its activities to members of its own species ... let alone address the ecological consequences of its industrial practices. (14)

Though he predates both theorists, anarchist philosopher Murray Bookchin argues that “our basic ecological problems stem from social problems” (35). It is hierarchy then—a hierarchy that capitalism as a hegemonic socio-economic system upholds and perpetuates—that justifies the exploitation of nature. These are the overtly political approaches to conceptions of ecology and environmentalism that this thesis will work with; however, this “working with” will not necessarily be explicit. Rather, perspectives from such aggressively

political—and theory-oriented— ecocritics and eco-philosophers as Foster and Purchase will work as a critical *foundation* to the arguments made here.

This conceptualization of capitalism as anti-environmental by default functions as a critical foundation for the overarching arguments in my thesis and, moreover, underpins my decision to *break* from the more conventional, theory-resistant strands of ecocriticism and focus, instead, on establishing an ecocritical line of inquiry in the field of contemporary cultural studies that acknowledges the inability of capitalism to reconcile with environmentalism. I will argue that contemporary “ethical” capitalism co-opts the discourse of environmentalism, thereby sapping the radical political potential of environmentalism by blurring the distinction between activism and consumption.⁶ I argue that this co-opted discourse is consistent with McRobbie’s conceptualization of post-feminism—the result of popular culture “undoing” feminism—and also with Žižek’s notion of contemporary “ethical” capitalism enforcing a “decaffeinated ideology” that is lacking in essential substance. Through the synthesis of these two approaches towards the power-structures of popular culture and contemporary socio-economic order, I argue that the paradoxical use of environmentalism as a promotional tool for advocating consumption-as-activism marks environmentalism’s transformation into post-environmentalism. Before doing so, it is also necessary to clarify the loaded terminology utilized throughout the thesis that has historically contested definitions and bears significant weight on the arguments made throughout this thesis: environmentalism, ideology, and postmodern capitalism.

⁶ Here, and throughout the thesis, radical politics are to be understood as those which seek to actively disrupt and challenge hegemonic socio-economic order, particularly capitalism. Legitimate environmental politics is further to be understood as radically informed by default, whereas post-environmentalism seeks to obfuscate this radical foundation.

Environmentalism:

For the sake of clarity and consistency, I am using a definition of environmentalism that is proposed by political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis in 1996. He states:

when we refer to Green politics and Green ideology we are not referring to general ideas of conservation, preservationism, etc. ... What differentiates this new phenomenon from the preceding forms of conservationism and environmentalism is its universal, 'holistic' and deeply political claims about nature, environmental crisis and its relation to the human world. Ecological radicalism, at least in its 'pure' form, rejects in toto the dominant structures of industrial society and advocates a new order which, as the Greens claim, will restore the lost harmony between human beings and nature. (260)

Here, Stavrakakis provides both a concise and in-depth description of the relatively *recent* (post-1960s) development of “green” politics, which he situates within the larger civil rights movement(s) of the United States. While I am sceptical of such an essentialist notion as “lost harmony” and would even argue that most contemporary environmentalists or advocates of the broader “environmental justice” movement are equally sceptical of a supposed *lost* harmony, which implies there once *was* harmony with “nature.”⁷ While there are a number of working definitions of contemporary environmentalism, the important stress here for Stavrakakis, and throughout this thesis, is that environmentalism as such is a *recent political tendency* unlike, for example, conservationism,⁸ which often gets conflated with

⁷ There are, however, some more fundamentalist strands of environmentalist thought, such as Deep Ecology and Anarcho-Primitivism, that do subscribe to a notion of “lost harmony,” which they believe can be (re-)achieved through anti-civilizationist measures. See the work of Derrick Jensen and John Zerzan, particularly Zerzan’s work *Future Primitive*, for more elaboration on these movements.

⁸ Conservationism is a perception, not necessarily tied to a specific ideology, that is largely concerned with the conservation of what is deemed as natural and is based on an assumption that human beings can “govern” the natural world and regulate it in a situation-based manner, such as wildlife preservation: “Whereas

environmentalism. This focus provides a narrow working definition that post-environmentalism derives from, in the sense that post-environmentalism functions as a response to the more recent manifestations of the “green” movement.

Ideology:

While it is difficult to relay the nuanced understanding of ideology and its critiques in such limited space, it proves more fruitful to illustrate how I use the term, and why I use it in such a manner. In an essay entitled “The Spectre of Ideology,” Žižek writes that “as Fredric Jameson perspicaciously remarked, nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer” (1) and, as a result, critiques and discussions of ideology are no longer pressing. In *Ideology: Structuring Identities in Contemporary Life*, Gordon Bailey and Noga Gayle provide a basic definition of the term: “Ideologies, at the simplest level, are systems of beliefs that guide our choices and behaviours and, indeed, justify our thoughts and actions” (2). However, the term is ambiguous in some respects. Speaking to the ambiguity of the term, which has recently become one that is often used pejoratively,⁹ Žižek points out that

‘Ideology’ can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power. (“Spectre” 3-4)

For the purposes of this thesis, my working definition will lean towards the first two designations that Žižek identifies, although it will continue to *imply* the other, their

conservationism can only lead to particular interventions, as the campaign to save endangered species the aim of Green ideology is to refound and recreate the political, social and economic foundations of western societies on the basis of a political project that is constructed around a certain conception of nature” (Stavrakakis 260).

⁹ Žižek points out that “[w]hen some procedure is denounced as ‘ideological par excellence’, one can be sure that its inversion is no less ideological” (“Spectre” 4). Here, through his use of “denounced,” Žižek suggests a context where “ideology” is used as a pejorative characterization.

recognition and acceptance; in other words, while I focus on the first two designations suggested in the passage above, Žižek's other designations in the passage will not create contradictions in my usage. To illustrate further, hegemonic notions or institutions, such as neoliberalism and postmodern capitalism, fall into the former category of ideology in that they are so integrated into banal aspects of, particularly Western but increasingly global, everyday life that their ideological functions or mechanics often remain unnoticed. When referring to hegemony-challenging ideologies, however, I gravitate towards the latter definition—"action-oriented set[s] of beliefs" ("Spectre" 3). At the same time, both definitions are not necessarily in opposition to each other as, for example, neoliberalism is both a set of beliefs as well as a hegemonic, socio-cultural reality of sorts that *relies* on its elusive ideological status to continue functioning "outside" of or "beyond" ideology.

Postmodern Capitalism:

Postmodern capitalism is a neologism of uncertain origin that is possibly coined by Žižek. It is present in his more recent oeuvre and is often used in conjunction with the notion of "ethical capitalism;"¹⁰ it builds on seminal theoretical characterizations of contemporary capitalism such as, for example, Fredric Jameson's "late capitalism" and Felix Guattari's notion of "Integrated World Capitalism." Both argue that capitalism today is markedly more "evolved" in some ways and indeed more pervasive than the earlier stages of capitalism that Marx famously examines in *Capital*. Jameson points out in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that what characterizes late capitalism is the notion that "[n]o one particularly notices the expansion of the state sector and bureaucratization any longer: it seems a simple, 'natural' fact of life" (xvii). Jameson continues:

¹⁰ See, for example, essays in Žižek's *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (2012).

What marks the development of the new concept [of late capitalism] over the older one ... is not merely an emphasis on the emergence of new forms of business organization (multinationals, transnationals) beyond the monopoly stage but, above all, the vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from older imperialism. (xvii-xviii)

Guattari's arguments correlate with Jameson's: "This evolution [of capitalism] ought to make us reflect upon the ways in which earlier forms of capitalism operated ... At present, [Integrated World Capitalism] is all of a piece: productive-economic-subjective" (Guattari 32). Both Jameson and Guattari mark a shift in capitalism, as well as suggest that this shift is a decentering and "spilling over" of sorts which results in capitalism's dissemination into spheres of existence outside of the exclusively *economic*. It is from this base that postmodern capitalism emerges—it is postmodern in the sense that it is decentralized and that it is not bound to one area of the socio-political reality. Moreover, it is in this context that capitalism can exert pressures on a number of levels through venues such as mass media. Thus, the term itself designates functions of capitalism that the earlier versions did not perform.

However, particularly from the standpoint of more traditional Marxists like Alain Badiou, not only is postmodern capitalism considered a misnomer, so is Jameson's notion of "late capitalism" or Guattari's notion of Integrated World Capitalism. Badiou argues that Marx's analysis of capitalism still holds true and that its developments are consistent with Marx's foreshadowing:

The issue is whether this *anecdotal* compendium amounts to a 'postmodern' capitalism, a new capitalism, a capitalism worthy of Deleuze and Guattari's desiring

machines, a capitalism that by itself generates a collective understanding of a new kind, which provokes the rising up of a hitherto subjugated constituent power, a capitalism that bypasses the old power of states, a capitalism that proletarianizes the multitude and makes workers of immaterial intellect out of petit-bourgeois ... My position is the exact opposite: contemporary capitalism possesses all the features of classical capitalism. (10-11)

Badiou further clarifies his position by arguing that Marx's observations are not only still relevant, but that Marx's analysis anticipates contemporary manifestations of capitalism; thus, attributing the "postmodern" prefix to capitalism is misleading as capitalism has not "changed." Badiou's observations certainly are worthy of consideration, but they ultimately ignore the ways in which capitalism has constructed pervasive, promotional mass media and other technologies. While he does address this technological turn, Badiou glosses over the ideological *impact* that such promotional or consumerist hegemonies enact, which may or may not have *material* ramifications on contemporary capitalism. However, there are still significant socio-political implications that have ramifications on capitalism's ideological status. What this thesis aims to illustrate are precisely the ways in which those promotional mechanisms impact upon and obfuscate an ideology that challenges hegemonic capitalism: environmentalism. Before expanding on this theory of post-environmentalism, which builds upon these clarified terms, it is necessary to examine the theoretical backgrounds upon which this theory rests: cultural studies, discourse analysis, consumption studies, and contemporary studies of ideology in popular culture.

My approach to the study of advertisements is largely informed by Roland Barthes' seminal poststructuralist cultural studies text, *Mythologies*. Here, Barthes sets out to perform

“an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass-culture” (9). Following Barthes’ semiologic analysis of advertising, I will attempt to “de-code” contemporary advertisements’ appropriation of current environmental discourse. While Barthes focuses on “some myths of French daily life” (11), I focus on the myths of contemporary capitalism, contemporary (liberal) environmentalism, and their significant points of intersection. Consistent with Barthes’ conception that “myth” “is a type of speech [and that] everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse” (109), I will suggest that contemporary capitalism, through its hegemony, saturates environmentalism as an ideology through its ability to myth-make a potentially hegemony-challenging ideology such as environmentalism. Barthes’ approach to popular culture contributed to the emergence of a specific mode of analysis termed discourse analysis.

My discourse analysis of contemporary advertisements is informed by the work of Andrew Wernick and Mike Featherstone. Discourse analysis is a very broad theoretical approach that is directly influenced by semiotics and is also widely utilized in the realm of cultural studies. In *Promotional Culture*, Wernick argues that

All advertising, even the most informational and rationalistic, is ideological, if only in the formal sense that it places its audience in the role of buyer/consumer and seeks to dispose that audience favourably towards what is for sale ... The commodity they project as the object of desire is simultaneously presented as a cultural symbol charged with social significance. (31)

Building on Wernick’s work, I argue that rather than simply functioning as cultural symbols, the contemporary advertisements that appropriate environmental discourse present that social significance in terms of *ethics*. Further, I will be building on Featherstone’s analysis

regarding the “question of the growing prominence of the *culture* of consumption” which does not “merely regard consumption as derived unproblematically from production” (13, author’s emphasis); I argue, through an analysis of its appropriation of environmentalism, that the contemporary culture of consumption is based on principles of pseudo-ethics and politics. While discourse analysis in the vein of Wernick and Featherstone is a fundamental aspect of my approach to the study of advertisements in the context of environmentalism, there will be few overt references to discourse analysis; however, these scholars significantly inform my approach to the texts examined in this thesis.¹¹

A significant lens that I utilize in my critique of appropriations of environmental discourse is the lens of consumption studies as articulated by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman questions the role of ethics in a society that comprises consumers (as opposed to citizens in a Rousseauian sense). Bauman argues that in contemporary society ethics on the whole are inherently against the hegemonic features of the individual situated in “liquid” modernity, that is, self-interest, and individualism (31). Building on these perspectives, Canadian sociologist Josée Johnston has applied a consumer studies approach to a case study of the discourse of Whole Foods Market, a popular North American grocer that seeks to be both a large corporation and also an “ethical” retailer, as she deconstructs “ethical consumer discourse” as well as the “consumer-citizen hybrid” that is essential for the promotion of postmodern “ethical” capitalism (232-33). Johnston’s approach is essentially an *application* of the questions (and theories) explored by Bauman. Through my discourse analysis of contemporary advertising campaigns that focus on environmentalism, I explore the tension

¹¹ Here I am following Fredric Jameson as he suggests that discourse analysis is a means to “practice ideological analysis without calling it that” and that he “still prefer[s] to call /market/ what it is, an ideogeme” (*Postmodernism* 264). My suggestion is that though I am using “discourse analysis,” I am simultaneously claiming to “practice ideological analysis,” which is why discourse analysis informs rather than shapes the foundations of my approach to the analysis of contemporary advertisements.

between consumer and political being. Following Johnston, I argue that the existence of such a hybrid threatens the distinction between ethics and consumption, activism and consumerism.

Informing my analysis of ideology in popular culture, McRobbie and Žižek's critiques of hegemonic ideology factor most immediately into my notion of post-environmentalism. In her 2004 article "Post-feminism and Popular Culture," McRobbie identifies a breaking point in contemporary feminism wherein "feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (255); she terms this phenomenon "post-feminism." McRobbie suggests that contemporary popular culture is "undoing" feminism "while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well informed and even well-intended response to feminism" (255). I will argue that we can read this "undoing" of feminism *qua* misrepresentation in terms of broader hegemony-challenging ideologies—anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, environmentalism, and so on. Žižek, who identifies an emergence of a hegemonic ideology contained within contemporary postmodern capitalism—"eco" capitalism—supports these claims. In *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek argues that "the ideological version of capitalism which is emerging as hegemonic out of the present crises is that of a 'socially responsible' eco-capitalism" (34). This notion is an extension of Žižek's observations on the nature of postmodern capitalism as ideologically paradoxical; a notion that Žižek analogizes with a paradoxical object, a chocolate laxative. Paraphrasing Žižek, Paul A. Taylor suggests that the chocolate laxative "nevertheless evocatively describes the ideological process of manipulation in which the problem (the chocolate that causes the constipation) is sold as the solution (its laxative effects)" (102). Further, Žižek applies the theory of the chocolate laxative to that of the hegemonic "eco" capitalism

described earlier. As Taylor suggests, Žižek “extends this speculation, applying it to our current conceptualizations of ‘ethical consumption’”. Supposedly well-intentioned attempts to escape a socially and ecologically harmful capitalist dynamic are merely *disguised forms of that very system in action*” (104, emphasis added). This type of paradoxical pseudo-ideology is consistent with my identification and explorations of the co-opted discourse of environmentalism in popular culture.

My rationale in using such a seemingly unlikely hybrid of McRobbie’s theories of feminism in contemporary popular culture (post-feminism) in conjunction with Žižek’s approach to ideology in contemporary society (postmodern “ethical” capitalism) is as follows: in many ways, McRobbie and Žižek are identifying similar issues with regard to contemporary capitalism. For McRobbie, capitalism acknowledges feminism in a superficial manner and “promotes” feminism exclusively in these superficial terms, while for Žižek, a major identifying and reinforcing aspect of capitalism is its unique ability to appropriate the discourse of its adversaries, and ultimately using that discourse to its advantage. Building on both McRobbie’s and Žižek’s views, I will establish a conceptual and methodological framework for a critique of post-environmentalist¹² media. Indeed, like feminism, environmentalism is being “undone” through popular culture, mass media, at the hands of postmodern “ethical” capitalism. Through this undoing, there is an ever-increasing privatization of ethics—particularly environmental ethics—which results in a discourse that

¹² I cannot claim full originality with the term post-environmentalism as Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus’ article “The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World” contains the first use of the term “post-environmental.” However, the article is a criticism of the current environmental movement in the context of bureaucratic politics and policies and uses the concept in a manner that is in not, without “grasping at straws,” related to my own work with post-environmentalism. Their concept suggests that environmentalism no longer serves its original purpose and that it is necessary to move “beyond” environmentalism; this perspective arguably has more positive connotations than my usage of post-environmentalism does.

promotes an unwavering belief that the only form of ethical action or behaviour is, simply, *ethical consumption*.¹³

Chapter One implements the theory of post-environmentalism to analyze recent advertisement campaigns by Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Clorox that stress sustainable behaviour on the part of both the consumer and the corporation. All three of these companies' respective campaigns attempt to equate environmentalist acts with the consumption of their products. Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi utilize "environmentally friendly" packaging and commitments to the environment and local communities. Clorox—a major manufacturer of bleach—has also created a specific "eco-friendly" line of cleaners that they label *Green Works* and, like Coca-Cola and Pepsi, they use environmentalist discourse to promote the consumption of their products. I argue that there is a fundamental contradiction in such an appropriation of environmentalist discourse which undermines environmentalism by paradoxically promoting consumption as a solution to environmental degradation brought on by overconsumption.

In Chapter Two, I examine recent North American car advertisements by Toyota, Chevrolet, and Ford. Like the household consumption objects discussed in Chapter One, Ford, Chevrolet, and Toyota are appropriating environmentalist discourse not only to promote the sale of their vehicles, but also to leave the automotive industry unscathed in terms of criticisms of environmental damage. As a symbol for North American individualism, the personal vehicle is antithetical to environmentalist critiques of

¹³ It is important here to point out that there is a term in popular lexicon that is similar to what I am attempting to theorize—greenwashing. This term is a reworking of the well-known concept of whitewashing and is so popular that there is a website developed in part by the University of Oregon dedicated to the identification of advertisements or products that take part in greenwashing. The website is largely user generated; users upload an advertisement and other users "rate" the advertisement for its degree (between 1 and 5) of greenwashing ("About Greenwashing"). While greenwashing is interesting, this thesis seeks to take this notion a step further by developing the concept theoretically and systematically analyzing its construction of discourse and its socio-political ramifications.

consumption; however, through the promotion of “green” technologies (such as hybrid cars), the automotive industry attempts to combat such critiques. While the benefits of these technologies, such as increased gas mileage, are touted, ecological awareness and environmental action are construed as analogous to any other *option* in a car, such as leather seats or power windows. What occurs, then, is an extension of the appropriations of environmentalism as identified in the first chapter. It expresses a reflexively superficial implementation of environmentalism through rhetoric that obscures the political potential of environmentalism by promoting a version of scientism, an ideology of technological “progress,” which suggests that the ecological crisis can be solved not only *by* technology, but through the use of that technology.

Chapter Three focuses on a pseudo-grass-roots campaign in Canada called *Ethical Oil*, as well as web-based promotion material from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. Even more so than the advertising campaigns mentioned above, *Ethical Oil* collapses the distinction between consumer and activist. Indeed, the campaign functions as a Baudrillardian hyperreal in a simulacrum of activism. The campaign itself promotes the Canadian tar sands by contrasting the socio-economic and socio-ethical behaviour of Canada as a nation with other oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia. *Ethical Oil* utilizes nationalistic rhetoric to create a self-serving dichotomy wherein Canadian oil is framed as the “obvious” ethical choice. What happens here, I argue, is that ethics are correlated with consumption and, like the effect of the advertisements analyzed in Chapters One and Two, the result is a collapsing of the distinction between consumerism and activism. While this is not a dangerous collapse for those profiting from it—Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Clorox, Toyota, Chevrolet, Ford, and the tar sands—it is dangerous for anyone concerned with global

capitalism's disastrous effects on the environment, as the correlation of consumption and activism essentially functions to overshadow and, as a result, *erase* legitimate activism that is separate from and challenging to hegemony. Furthermore, it erases the political potential of radical environmentalism by conflating environmentalist activism with consumption, which has clear ramifications for *any* hegemony-challenging politics.

Taken together, these three chapters ultimately argue that contemporary capitalism appropriates environmentalist discourse for its own promotion and that the resulting discourse is post-environmentalist. It is as if contemporary capitalism has buried environmentalism in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, resulting in the rise of a zombie discourse (post-environmentalism), a discourse that lacks its very political essence as it disguises itself as politics. Furthermore, post-environmentalist discourse functions to collapse the distinction between activism (political action) and consumerism (taking part in consumption) in a problematic manner, raising important questions as to the future of radical ideology; what does the future of politics look like if there is no ability to distinguish between radical politics or activism and consumption? While this thesis does not aim at a comprehensive answer to this question, it will provide the theoretical and discursive tools to *make* that distinction as the boundary that separates politics and consumption becomes more and more blurred: to deconstruct the paradoxes present in hegemonic capitalist ideology—the ideology of consumption.

Chapter One
**Ecology as Commodity: Consumption, Eco-products, and Post-
Environmentalism in Contemporary Consumer Culture**

“No one can win against kipple,” he said, “except temporarily and maybe in one spot, like in my apartment I’ve sort of created a stasis between the pressure of kipple and nonkipple, for the time being. But eventually I’ll die or go away, and then the kipple will again take over. It’s a universal principle operating throughout the universe; the entire universe is moving toward a final state of total, absolute kippleization.”

PHILIP K. DICK, *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP*

In the post-apocalyptic, dystopian world of Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, “kipple” dominates spatiality. “Kipple” is, as John Isidore states, “useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday’s homeopape” and, as Isidore continues to explain, “When nobody’s around, kipple reproduces itself” (Dick 65). Dick’s absurdist materialization—“kipple”—not only functions to highlight the pervasiveness of waste in his fictional world, but provides the grounds for reflection on the role and prevalence of waste in the contemporary reality. Indeed, in Dick’s world, waste has become so pervasive that its pseudo-mitosis is a fact of everyday life and something Isidore banally relays to Pris. In many ways, Dick’s kipple-ridden future functions as a stark prophecy and acknowledgement of a culture whose central essence is (over)consumption. Dick portrays a post-consumption world where the only absurdist aspect of “kipple” is its ability to multiply, not its spatial domination. In contemporary North American society, waste is certainly pervasive, but it does not yet have a life of its own, nor does it accumulate in the immediate, intimate space of the consumer; instead, it is deposited in landfills that are strategically kept out of the public eye. Waste is, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, a necessary and fundamental characteristic of contemporary consumerist society: “The consumerist economy thrives on the turnover of commodities, and is seen as booming when more money changes

hands; and whenever money changes hands, some consumer products are travelling to the dump” (36) as “the consumerist economy has to rely on excess and waste” (*Consuming Life* 38). Waste, or garbage, then, becomes a crucial component in the maintenance of current hegemonic socio-political institutions, despite the increasingly dire ecological ramifications of the hegemonic patterns of production and consumption that *produce* such excessive waste. Heather Rogers correlates Bauman’s observations in her 2005 book *Gone Tomorrow*, which examines the ecological and socio-cultural role of garbage in the United States. Expressing the symbolic implications of garbage, Rogers states that

trash is the visible interface between everyday life and the deep, often abstract horrors of ecological crisis. Through waste we can read the logic of industrial society’s relationship to nature and human labor ... in garbage we find material proof that there is no plan for stewarding the earth, that resources are not being conserved, that *waste and destruction are the necessary analogues of consumer society*. (3, emphasis added)

Here, Rogers highlights the tensions between the banal patterns of consumption in North America and the environmental movement which seeks to enact precisely what Rogers states that “there is no plan for” (3). There is, then, an explicit connection between objects of consumption, the waste produced by them, and the current ecological crises. Before examining this relationship, however, it is necessary to highlight the ways in which objects themselves have been understood in cultural studies discourse.

The pervasive role of “things” (objects, commodities, etc.) as well as the *consumption* of “things” in Western society has not passed by the scrutiny of critical theory. Regarding consumption, Jean Baudrillard states in his seminal 1968 book *The Systems of Objects* that

consumption is surely *not* that passive process of absorption and appropriation which is contrasted to the supposedly active mode of production, thus counterposing two oversimplified patterns of behaviour (and of alienation). It has to be made clear from the outset that consumption is an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our *entire cultural system*. (*Objects* 217, emphasis added)

Activity is a central concept in understanding not only the pervasive dynamics of consumption in contemporary society, but also the role that objects play within the spheres of consumption.

Objects, then, occupy a significant role in the fluid, active matrices of consumption, but not an exclusive role, and not all objects are objects of consumption; rather, “objects and material goods are not in fact the object of consumption—they are the object merely of needs and of the satisfaction of needs” (Baudrillard *The System of Objects* 217). This is not to say that objects are not consumed, but rather that a status of “object” does not *de facto* designate it as an object of consumption. What is crucial here in *The System of Objects* is Baudrillard’s argument that objects are not simply “objects” as such, but rather, objects—particularly objects as commodities—are entrenched in a complex semiotic system saturated in signification, which shapes contemporary, consumption-driven postmodern society.¹ Understanding the ideological forces at play in objects, then, requires a sophisticated understanding of those whose interests are vested in the consumption of objects—those who construct the promotional context to create the *desire* for such objects. Baudrillard limits his analysis in *The System of Objects* to specific,

¹ Baudrillard’s understanding of “objects” as comprising a semiotic system—that is, a system governed by signs and signification—is echoed by the concept of semicapitalism. Gary Genosko writes that Franco Berardi “defines semicapital as ‘capital-flux that coagulates in semiotic artefacts without materializing itself’” and that “[t]here is a certain degree of overlap between the Guattarian conception of Integrated World Capitalism, Semicapitalism and post-Fordism” (150-1). What is significantly acknowledged in both theories are semiotic processes involved in contemporary capitalism.

heavily symbolic objects such as antiques, which notably lack use value, as well as certain objects like soft drinks and other commodities with a very specific use-value (such as drinking and eating); however, these objects are governed by the same systems of signification, which is something Roland Barthes makes clear in *Mythologies* as he analyzes the discourse of everything from fashion magazines to electoral photography. The suggestion here is that our surroundings, and thus our realities as such, are deeply rooted in and largely informed by sign-systems, whether through advertisements for soft drinks or through the modes of organization of furniture.

In many ways, this epistemology of “things” has a causative relationship with waste; waste is an essential telos of this system of objects. Both Bauman’s and Rogers’ observations regarding the necessity of waste in the consumerist society equation reveal this relationship. Moreover, the well-known recycling mantra, “reduce, reuse, and recycle,” is fundamentally at odds with the socio-cultural and socio-economic climate that capitalism produces. Bauman elaborates on the necessity of waste in a consumerist society (the liquid modern society),² stating that “to keep the consumerist economy going, the pace of adding to the already enormous volume of novelties is bound to overshoot any target made to the measure of already recorded demand” (*Consuming Life* 38). On a number of levels, then, the contemporary hegemonic socio-economic systems that seek to maximize profits by producing commodities that do not last and as a result produce more waste are in their very essence antithetical to any form of

² Bauman describes contemporary culture in terms of “liquid modernity” in an explicit effort to avoid the confusion that has historically been involved in defining postmodernism. Discussing the metaphor and its implementation of the connotations of fluidity, Bauman states that

Fluids travel easily. They ‘flow’, ‘spill’, ‘run out’, ‘splash’, ‘pour over’, ‘leak’, ‘flood’, ‘spray’, ‘drip’, ‘seep’, ‘ooze’; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped - they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. From the meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed - get moist or drenched. The extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of ‘lightness’ [...] These are reasons to consider ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity. (*Liquid Modernity* 2)

Bauman’s implementation of liquidity, here, is not a radical break from some of Jameson’s key qualities of postmodernism, particularly Jameson’s notion of undifferentiatedness; at the same time, however, Bauman’s “liquid modernity” is also more of a narrow perception of the contemporary condition.

conservationism and, particularly, environmentalism. With new forms of postmodern, “ethical” capitalism that *attempt* to reconcile environmentalism and capitalism, questions arise as to the *possibility* of such reconciliation between profit-motivated capitalism and sustainability-motivated environmentalism.

The ethical, environmentalist discourse present in increasingly pervasive corporate “business philosophies” is the result of very specific and strategic advertising campaigns. Advertising, then, plays a crucial role in the creation and perpetuation of the *signification* of certain commodities; that is, it plays a crucial role in attaching socio-cultural meanings to commodities. Signification, here, is meant to retain its semiotic connotations in a manner that extends Wernick’s notions of processional, structural aspects of advertising as the consumer’s demand for a product is the result of “reading” the advertisement as a synthesis of a “product signifier” and its status as a “cultural symbol” (32). In other words, advertising creates and thus provides the *signified* of the advertising sign-system equation while products themselves function as signifiers; it inscribes “meanings” onto products. Baudrillard suggests that “[w]hat advertising bestows upon objects, the quality without which ‘they would not be what they are’, is ‘warmth’” (*The System of Objects* 185). Warmth, here, can be understood as correlative with the inscription of a socio-cultural “meaning” that advertising constructs and provides for commodities.

It is important to point out that advertising is a pervasive socio-cultural form in contemporary North American—and increasingly global—society. Indeed, Baudrillard quite significantly argues in *The System of Objects* that “advertising supplies us with the ideal object and casts a particularly revealing light upon the system of objects [...] *we may safely rely on*

advertising to tell us what it is that we consume through objects” (179, emphasis added).³

Extending Baudrillard’s observations that people are willing, or at the very least cynically complacent, participants in this promotional matrix (*The System of Objects* 185), I argue that our contemporary reality is largely shaped by the relationship between advertising, consumption, and, ultimately, hegemony. Baudrillard’s sentiments are echoed by Wernick, who views advertising itself as a form of ideology (22-47). He argues that “[a]ll advertising, even the most informational and rationalistic, is ideological, if only in the formal sense that it places its audience in the role of buyer/consumer and seeks to dispose that audience favourably towards what is for sale” (31, emphasis added). Wernick’s use of the polysemantic “dispose” can be expanded upon: it acknowledges the excess-waste qualities of contemporary consumer culture and capitalism while also highlighting the sole and superficial purpose of promotion, which is to create a context wherein the advertised product will be desired and bought. Advertising discourse does not seek to engage its audience of consumers intellectually, but instead actively works against such engagement through an attempted construction and perpetuation of a type of false consciousness.

The appropriation of discourses existing outside of the commercial spheres is not necessarily a new venture in promotion. Discussing the 1960s and appropriation of youth (counter-)cultural discourse in advertising, Thomas Frank states that “[c]ommercial fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright ‘revolution’ against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming ... and advertising across the product-category spectrum [*sic*] calls upon consumers to break rules and find themselves” (4). What Frank highlights here is the pervasive

³ In terms of feminist analyses of promotional culture and advertising, see Jean Kilbourne’s award winning documentary series *Killing Us Softly*, which was first released in 1979, and her seminal text *Can’t Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* (1979).

manner in which promotional texts paradoxically utilize discourses that are anti-corporate (or counter-corporate) for the purposes of corporate endeavours. However, more recently, the scope of contemporary capitalism's ability to appropriate has evolved to adapting hegemony-challenging ideologies and discourses such as, for example, feminism, which ultimately functions to *undermine* those counter hegemonic perspectives.⁴ Angela McRobbie identifies this trend in broader popular culture, but also mentions specific advertisements, such as one from Wonderbra which "tak[es] feminism into account by showing it to be a thing of the past, by provocatively 'enacting sexism' while at the same time playing with those debates in film theory about women as the object of the gaze" (258). The mechanisms that McRobbie identifies here, which paradoxically engage with feminism on both a superficial as well as sophisticated level, operate similarly towards contemporary environmentalism. As Slavoj Žižek points out, postmodern capitalism contemporaneously purports to subserve an ethical, environmentalist sensibility; the machinery that puts post-environmentalism into motion is similar to that which is behind post-feminism—environmentalism is acknowledged and undermined through its profitable utilization as a new form, post-environmentalism.

This chapter focuses on three corporations that produce household commodities, analyzing the promotional campaigns, which seek to frame their respective corporations as environmentally ethical, despite the inherently unsustainable attributes of the commodities produced by each corporation. While exploring the manifestations of the theoretical paradigm of post-environmentalism in recent advertising campaigns—both televised and exclusively online—from soft drink giants Coca Cola and Pepsi to chlorine bleach manufacturer, Clorox, it becomes

⁴ Featherstone views postmodern or late capitalism as performing a function of "the aestheticization of everyday life" with one crucial example being "the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society" (67). The aestheticization reaches out, here, to ideological matrices and thus opens up a process wherein ideologies (such as feminism or environmentalism) become aestheticized and subsequently commodified all while rendering void their respective socio-political implications.

clear that these corporations are appropriating environmentalist or “green” discourse as a means of promoting the consumption of their products in an overt and paradoxical (neo)liberalization of environmentalism’s radical potential.⁵ Coca Cola, Pepsi, and Clorox achieve this ideological nullification by blurring the distinction between (environmentally) ethical behaviour and consumption, thereby *veiling* consumption—an inherently antagonistic behaviour in terms of environmentalism—with a thin layer of superficial environmentalist discourse. This creates a commercial matrix wherein ethical behaviour becomes a commodity itself as it is bought and sold through such “ethical” products.

Mother Nature and Father Corporation: Coca-Cola, Nature, and the Power of Semantics

In a relatively recent advertising campaign entitled “Live Positively,” Coca Cola emphasizes its positive environmental and community behaviours, as well as its “responsibility” to promote and perpetuate such behaviours. Here, one particular advertisement stands out. Voiced over by a child, this advertisement utilizes a family element in an attempt to construct Coca-Cola as an ethical corporation of sorts. The child’s father-character is a delivery driver for Coca Cola and the child relays to a classroom that his father not only delivers a soft drink, but further, he delivers “a new kind of bottle made partly from plants” among other equally inspiring abstractions and, further, that his “dad supports water and nature” (“Big Red Truck”). Here, the attempts at the creation of audience sympathies are overt: the son revering his father in front of his classmates suggests Coca Cola’s support of the family, the wide-angle shots of “nature” suggest cleanliness, and so on. Aside from the invocation of sympathies, the father-son dynamic functions on a deeper level. Indeed, one can read the relationship as that of consumer and corporation; the “son” functions as a consumer in reverence of the “father’s” (corporation’s)

⁵ The reference to “neoliberalization” here functions to highlight the ways in which environmentalism is being relegated to market and market discourse.

benevolent behaviour in terms of environment and community, despite the inherent tension between environmental politics and capitalism. Further, in this context, should the consumer-son negate that “benevolence,” he is easily brushed off as acting out from a cliché and reactionary Oedipal Complex where the son-consumer strives to destroy the father-corporation in an effort to possess the “mother” as nature. This is precisely the argument that the advertisement is attempting to make: Coca Cola is a benevolent corporation; it *gives back*, so by further consuming Coca Cola products, one also takes part in that system, acting as some sort of consumer-activist. This argument functions to quell any challenges from Coca Cola’s critics and naysayers—of which there are many.⁶

Building on the promotion of the partnership between Coca-Cola and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Coca-Cola announced that over the 2011 holiday season, Coca-Cola will be changing the colour of its cans from red to white “as a symbol of [its] commitment” to WWF (“Arctic Home”). In this treatment, the appropriation of environmentalist as well as environmental conservationist discourse is immediately apparent. This appropriation is further evidenced by the fact that for over half of the advertisement, Coca-Cola is not even mentioned, as it functions as a pseudo-public service announcement on polar bears. Considering that this campaign is a Canadian one, its hypotext is easily identifiable as the well-known piece of Canadiana, *Hinterland Who’s Who*, a programme that produced short nature conservancy public service announcements from the 1960s and, which has more recently done so in an updated format. What is the effect of this arguably parodic intertextual appropriation of *Hinterland Who’s Who*? The appropriation functions to conflate the consumption of Coca-Cola to the conservation of polar bears; it conflates consumption with ethical activism. One can apply

⁶ The relatively recent documentary *The Coca-Cola Case* follows a lawyer who is attempting to produce a lawsuit against Coca-Cola on trial for alleged anti-union human rights abuses in bottling plants in South America. These alleged labour violations speak quite strongly against what the advertisement in question suggests.

Žižek's criticisms of the "ethical" company TOMS Shoes to the message of this Coca-Cola advertisement: "the very act of participating in consumerist activity is simultaneously presented as a participation in the struggle against the evils ultimately caused by capitalist consumerism" (*End Times* 356). In this context, the paradoxical and tautological process of consumerism at work functions to collapse the distinction between activism and consumption.

Pushing the notion of "naturalization" to an absurdist extreme, an advertisement for Canada Dry Ginger Ale, a subsidiary Coca-Cola product, centres around a group of individuals pulling up what look like vegetables from the rows on a farm. Once the "vegetable" is in sight, it is revealed that what is growing is actually Canada Dry Ginger Ale ("Canada Dry"). The message is clear: Canada Dry is *so* natural that it literally grows in the ground. While it is obvious that this is impossible, the suggestion here is that there is essentially no difference between the refined product (Canada Dry) and actual ginger root. Canada Dry functions as a metonymic substitution for actual ginger root. What occurs here is a crucial collapse between the identification of raw material and an actual product—the result of labour and reshaping of that raw material—that functions to nullify any substantial signification present in the term "natural" by voiding it of its previous connotations and stretching the definition of it beyond its previously inherent qualities. Moreover, this use of "natural" illustratively points towards a crucial aspect of the struggle that exists between environmentalism as such and what I call post-environmentalism: the semiotic aspect. It seems as though Coca-Cola recognizes the importance of semantics and diction; Coca-Cola, here, arbitrarily defines its product as "natural"—what its advertisers more than likely would label as a "buzzword"—and in turn *alters* the definition of the word itself. Indeed, and this is not to trivialize the matter, much of the struggle involved in

contemporary capitalism's appropriation of environmentalism and other ethico-political tendencies that are challenging toward capitalism is a struggle of *words and discursivity*.

Taking a cue from the “Live Positively” campaign is a recent advertisement for Dasani—a bottled water produced by Coca-Cola—that promotes its new “PlantBottle,” a plastic bottle that is made from *up to* thirty percent plant materials (“Dasani”).⁷ Semiotically, the advertisement is quite similar to “Big Red Truck”; both frame the advertisements with establishing “nature” shots—here by using a computer-generated globe as the establishing frame, which transforms into a Dasani bottle. However, where the “Big Red Truck” advertisement required some analytical unpacking to expose its ideological underpinnings, the post-environmentalist paradox at work in the context of this advertisement is immediately apparent in both form (a plant-based plastic bottle to package water) and content (the presentation of that plant bottle in the ad itself). This is environmentalist hyper-reality forged by post-environmentalism as the very notion of bottled water is inherently ecologically harmful and indeed runs contrary to any ideology that challenges over-consumption. Moreover, plastic can be read as a *pure* signifier of the antithesis of environmentalism. Discussing plastic and fashion, Barthes states that “fashion for plastic highlights an evolution in the myth of ‘imitation’ materials” (*Mythologies* 98) and it is in this context that the hybrid plant-plastic can be read as an imitation of environmentalism. The “PlantBottle” absorbs these aforementioned critiques by touting a new technology that, on the surface, brushes aside those who challenge the very notion of bottled water. This absorption is literally represented in the portion of the advertisement in which the “PlantBottle” emerges from a particularly yonic plant, thereby invoking birthing imagery; in turn, this imagery suggests that

⁷ It must be noted that Pepsi has a similar product in Canada that is called “Ecogreen,” which is the name of the technology that Pepsi applies to the creation of its version of a plant-based plastic bottle that is used exclusively for 7-Up products. To avoid painful repetition and tautology, Pepsi’s version will not be analyzed here because the foundations of that critique apply both to Coca-Cola’s “PlantBottle” and Pepsi’s “Ecogreen” technology.

the “PlantBottle” is birthed by what we can call “Mother Nature.” In this case, again, the distinction between a consumption object and an object that “creates a better future” (“Dasani”) collapses in on itself as it problematically conflates corporate production with some brand of environmental activism. Indeed, the “PlantBottle” is literally the material manifestation of post-environmentalism; it quite aptly—and transparently—confirms, among other markers of post-environmentalism, its status as environmentalism *sans* politics.

Although it is tempting to identify advertisements as somehow innocent, or at least innocuous, because it is unclear as to who actually *believes* the messages that are communicated through them, their pervasiveness points towards the necessity of critically examining them. The Coca Cola advertisements that seek to frame the consumption of its products as beneficial to the community (“Big Red Truck”), polar bears (“Arctic Home”), and the broader environment (“Dasani”) have significant repercussions for the *signification* of environmentalism. Coca Cola’s appropriation of environmentalism and ethical discourse literally *naturalizes* the capitalist structures of consumption that are at odds with environmentalism as such; it creates a context wherein it becomes impossible to conceptualize socio-political action *outside of the consumerist sphere*.

Democracy *qua* Pepsi: Business, Corporate Citizens, and the Post-Environmentalist Tyranny of Plutocracy

The premiere competitor of Coca Cola, PepsiCo, utilizes the discourse of environmentalism—as well as democracy—in a similar manner to Coca-Cola, ultimately co-opting ethical discourse of Non-Profit, Non-Governmental Organizations. Moreover, Pepsi is actively promoting the ways in which they have integrated “sustainability” into their business practices through *YouTube* and other televisual media venues. What separates PepsiCo’s

approaches from Coca-Cola's and Clorox's advertisements are its explicit—rather than implicit—references to its functioning as a citizen, whereas, particularly for Coca-Cola in its “Big Red Truck” and “Arctic Home” advertisements, such lines of thought are *implied*, but the responsibility is ultimately placed upon to the consumer-reader to make those connections. This explicitness situates PepsiCo in an interesting space with regard to its promotion of “sustainability” as it constructs itself less as a corporation and more as a pseudo-governmental (or pseudo-non-governmental) organization; it suggests rather insularly and crassly that “business” (and as a result, consumption) is the exclusive answer to ethical and environmental crises.

Like Coca-Cola, Pepsi also promotes a campaign strikingly similar to the earlier described “Live Positively” campaign entitled “Refresh,” a campaign which has received a minor amount of attention from Žižek in his 2010 book, *Living in the End Times*. The “Refresh” campaign, unlike the analogous Coca-Cola “Live Positively” campaign, focuses on the participation of its consumers in a system of voting online for “projects” that in some form or another contribute to the community, the environment, and so on (“Pepsi Refresh Project”). In the context of broader ethical consumerist promotion, Žižek states:

Pepsi Cola has pushed the manipulation of this humanitarian surplus to an unexpected level of reflexivity: consumers are not only promised that part of the company's profit will go to humanitarian and other causes, they are even solicited for ideas about how to spend the money and then offered a chance to vote on which idea will be implemented...

(357)

Expanding on this criticism, the “Refresh” campaign collapses the distinction between non-profit organization (NPO) and corporation, functioning simultaneously as both NPO and corporation in

a hyper-real amalgamation of pseudo-politics. Indeed, by appropriating the discourse of an NPO—aptly evidenced by the tagline of the campaign “[d]ream it, submit it, and we’ll help make it happen for your community” (“How it Works”)—the “Refresh” campaign *threatens* the very essence of an NPO by suggesting their irrelevance within hegemonic “ethical” capitalism— if a corporation can function both as corporation and ethical/environmental benefactor, where do NPOs fit? Indeed, the campaign functions almost as a prediction of a utopian capitalist future wherein the distinction between NPO and corporate entity is not only no longer necessary, but no longer possible. While the focus of the “Refresh” campaign is not exclusively environmental, its appropriation and obscuration of discourse that is antagonistic towards capitalism for the promotion of Pepsi products enforces its status as a post-environmentalist marketing strategy.

Although not a televised or printed advertisement, an advertisement recently uploaded to *YouTube* by PepsiCo illustrates quite aptly the political emptiness involved in the “sustainable” behaviour that post-environmentalist discourse purports. The advertisement itself contains stylized info-graphic style animation with flashing phrases like “Providing people with choices is good for business,” “Supporting our planet is good for business,” and “Investing in our people is good for business” with some obscure, but large dollar amount figures in the millions sporadically placed after each abstract, but “positive,” phrase (“Performance with Purpose”). It is significant to note the manner in which the dry, capitalist economic discourse of “investments” is superficially reconciled with environmentalism; such reconciliation functions to frame environmentalism exclusively within the confines of capitalism. Further, and most tellingly, the advertisement ends with the phrases “Good for all is good for business” and subsequently “And good business is good for all.” What this advertisement suggests is, aside from the glaringly obvious implication that capitalism—“business”—will garner positive outcomes, that capitalism

is the only option for society. Under the guise of a “do good” image, is this not a looming and foreboding confirmation of a phrase which Mark Fisher attributes to Jameson and Žižek, that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism” (2)?

Indeed, extending these efforts, in 2010 PepsiCo announced that it is “committed to bringing safe water to three million people by 2015” and that, as Dan Bena, PepsiCo’s Director of Sustainability, Health, Safety and Environment states, “our goals around water really are underpinned by a very public and very strong commitment that we made as PepsiCo last year and that’s a commitment to respect water as a fundamental human right” (“PepsiCo’s Commitment”). Bena continues to state that one of the ways in which this objective is accomplished is through “world class efficiency in our operations” (“PepsiCo’s Commitment”). Ultimately, these sustainability goals are PepsiCo’s efforts to be “a good citizen of the world” (“PepsiCo’s Commitment”). In this sense, as discussed above, Pepsi frames itself as functioning simultaneously as a corporation as well as community benefactor—a citizen. Such an explicit effort to construct themselves as a univocal, consumer-citizen is jarring. Indeed, PepsiCo’s rhetoric here, including the job title of “Director of Sustainability, Health, Safety and Environment,” quite unabashedly suggests that wherever poverty or environmental degradation, for example, exist, PepsiCo will be there to provide solutions to these issues. The paradox lays within the fact that poverty and environmental degradation are arguable *by-products* of contemporary multinational capitalism’s unfettered growth. Indeed, there are a number of issues contained within this claim by PepsiCo, one of the most glaring of which is the tension between a corporation that simultaneously declares water-as-human-right while also selling and actively promoting the sale of their branded, bottled water. Water, here, is a human right for PepsiCo, yet they continue to bottle it, sell it, and, ultimately, commodify it in a paradoxical expression of its

commitment to human rights. PepsiCo's rhetoric does not line up with its practices.

Furthermore, PepsiCo perpetuates such a commodification as being not at odds with their perception of water as a human right, and one must question what indeed a "commitment to water as a fundamental human right" tangibly *means*.

Placing the focus back to environmentalist discourse—the appropriation of environmentalist discourse was only a minor portion of the Pepsi advertisements discussed thus far—the section of PepsiCo's website that promotes the "Performance with a Purpose" slogan even further functions as an illustration of post-environmentalism par excellence. The section for "Environmental Sustainability" contains an embedded video stating that PepsiCo focuses "on performance that integrates environmental as well as human and talent sustainability" ("PepsiCo Environmental Sustainability"). On the surface, it seems as though PepsiCo is attempting to be more transparent as a corporation and, in turn, more "democratic." However, that transparency is a mask of post-environmental tautology. By placing environmental sustainability within the same priority context as such abstractions as "talent" sustainability, PepsiCo makes clear with what level of seriousness they treat environmental sustainability. However, despite PepsiCo's attempts at promoting sustainability as a foundation of their business, it is clear that "sustainability" simply functions as a marketing tool to promote an image of "ethical" capitalism.

The implications of utilizing concepts of sustainability as a promotional platform are significant. Ultimately, this utilization superficially reduces environmentalist (and broader) ethics to selling and buying points; what occurs here, then, is not simply an innocent "use" of environmentalism as a promotional concept, but rather, a utilization that contributes to the erosion of environmentalism's political and hegemony-challenging potential. What separates

PepsiCo from the two other corporations in this chapter is its direct implementation of the discourse of business, which is an *explicit* effort to construct concepts of sustainability purely as business ventures. The idea that human beings are perceived almost exclusively as consumers by an entity such as PepsiCo has qualities of plutocracy; the suggestion here—and this is applicable to almost every corporation’s promotional messages analyzed in this thesis—is that to make any form of tangible, positive change in the contemporary world people must essentially “vote with their money” to purchase goods from “ethical” corporations (that simultaneously function as citizens) providing a clear illustration of Fisher’s concerns in *Capitalist Realism* regarding the ubiquity of capitalism and its ability to absorb critiques.

Smells like Bleach: Clorox, “Reverse” Graffiti, and the Ambiguity of the Nature

To step away from food commodities, Clorox, a major North American bleach manufacturer, has recently developed a line of cleaning products that are comprised of “natural” ingredients, which Clorox deems as environmentally friendly. There is, here, a “short circuit” between Clorox the environmentalist corporation and Clorox the bleach manufacturer; the paradox lies in the fact that both corporate “identities” are separate poles of the same categorical spectrum, synthetic chemical manufacturers and plant-based cleaner manufacturers. Along with continuing to manufacture bleach, a chemical compound noted for its environmentally harmful qualities, this new line of “natural” cleaners speaks to the conditions of postmodern capitalism. Clorox, here, is a fragmented narrative in and of itself, which is an integral quality of postmodernity; discussing fragmentation in capitalism and postmodernism Jameson defines qualities of what he calls late capitalism as “atomic fragmentation and individualism” (380). This disjuncture not only places Clorox in the realm of postmodern capitalism, but also speaks to the superficial construction of the discourse of nature within Clorox’s advertisements for its

plant-based cleaner line, “Green Works.” While on the one hand, Clorox manufactures bleach, on the other, it manufactures plant-based materials; this disjuncture constructs an economic dynamic of “choices”—bleach for the larger populace and “Green Works” for the environmentalist. Moreover, the nature imagery used in the promotion of Clorox’s plant-based cleaners confirms its post-environmentalist status; Clorox unapologetically perpetuates a dichotomy that is internally inconsistent not only with environmentalist perspectives, but within its own practices. By implicitly suggesting through visual narrative that “nature” is intrinsically clean, Clorox creates a dichotomy where nature, and in turn “Green Works,” is clean and synthetic products are dirty; if one follows through fully with their logic, Clorox is its own antithesis. Thus, there is an express level of cognitive dissonance at play here as Clorox functions both as a corporation that seeks to cleanse “naturally” as well as one that seeks to cleanse with chemicals (bleach). By subscribing to both and neither perspectives, Clorox problematically undermines the foundations of environmentalist discourses that are *against* the use of environmentally destructive chemical compounds like bleach.

On its website, Clorox makes clear why it decided to create and market a line of environmentally friendly cleaning products: “We knew that moms like us were looking for ways to live a more natural lifestyle — and we made it our mission to help them achieve this goal” (“About Green Works”). This statement functions two-fold. First, it establishes an intimate relationship between Clorox and its consumers by using the collective “we” and the connecting phrase “like us,” which ultimately suggests a personification and thus *humanization* of the corporation. Second, it establishes the goals of the corporation in creating the product line and it frames those goals as *benevolent*. Problematically, the statement, in spite of its attempts to create a personal connection with its consumers, contains implicit sexism by suggesting that the only

individual using cleaning products is *female*. Ultimately, however, the attempted, surface-level message in this statement is that through the consumption of Green Works, one will lead a “more natural lifestyle,” illustrating a presumed connection between the products one consumes and the image of themselves consumers wish to portray.

Beginning with a wide-shot of a flower-laden field and no products in sight, one particular “Green Works” advertisement for dish soap states in voice-over narration that “from nature comes Green Works” (“Clorox Greenworks Commercial”).⁸ The advertisement continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of the cleaner. What is of importance here is the way in which the commodity in question is immediately linked to a “natural” world, free of any evidence of human disturbance: a world that is the by-product of ideological construction which ultimately functions to perpetuate a problematic, hierarchical view of nature as an entity somehow separate from the human sphere. Here, nature is being idealized, a process which some environmentalists may not see as problematic; however, even when disregarding the fact that this platonic idealization is a discursive strategy to create desire for a commodity, by upholding the dichotomy of idealized, clean nature against the dirty human world, Clorox is perpetuating a

⁸ The voice-over’s statement is particularly ironic (and arguably a form of “puffery”) considering the fact that an integral portion of the classical definition of a commodity is that the object is manufactured by humans, which means, for example, an unaltered object of the natural—what the advertisement suggests “Green Works” is—is de facto not a commodity. There have been, however, recent attempts to propose economic theories that would include the natural world and its resources as commodities; this is a movement known as natural capitalism (wherein the natural world and its untapped resources are treated as capital and integrated into the economy, including by being reflected in the prices of commodities) which has been pioneered by Paul Hawken in his 1999 book *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*. While there are numbers of problems with this perspective, including the arguable incalculability of the vast amounts of the earth’s un-commodified resources, such a theory speaks to the ways in which individuals are attempting to integrate “nature” into hegemonic socio-economic institutions in an effort to reconcile destructive socio-economic practices with the preservation of the natural world. Extending this logic, in 2006, Coca-Cola began a partnership with Recyclebank to make “recycling a rewarding experience” (“Recyclebank”). The description of the program carries on to say: “When you recycle, you earn redeemable Recyclebank Points for rewards from Coca-Cola and hundreds of other participating businesses” (“Recyclebank”). What Coca-Cola does here is implant an aspect of surplus value in the spheres of recycling, which adds a uniquely capitalist undercurrent to the process of recycling while ultimately suggesting that recycling as a consumer’s duty does not have intrinsic motivational qualities unless some form of capital can be hoarded. Moreover, this partnership presents recycling as an almost purely capitalist venture.

viewpoint that is fundamental for the justification of dominating nature—the dichotomy of humans versus nature. One can be reminded here of Levi-Strauss’ famous explorations of binarisms in *The Raw and the Cooked* through the concepts of raw and cooked food. Levi-Strauss’ example of the distinction between raw and cooked food is simply that without “cooked” there is no epistemological category of “raw” as such, which ultimately points towards the *culturally* constructed qualities of binarisms on the whole (1). In the context of Clorox’s advertisement, the very idea of an artificial world in opposition to a natural one (deemed “nature”) functions in a similar manner. Indeed, there is an interesting metacritical function at work in Clorox’s dynamic as within the realms of cleaning products, Clorox manufactures both chemical/synthetic products as well as “natural” ones. By constructing “artificial” and “natural” as diametrically opposed, Clorox unreflexively perpetuates a dichotomy that it functions on both sides of as manufacturers of bleach and manufacturers of plant-based cleaners. Such perpetuation expresses that Clorox is participating in the marginalization of nature. If nature is viewed as *separate*—the “other” in the culture/nature paradigm—from the human world (wherein production resides), the problematic binarism that Clorox promotes itself to be reacting against remains unchallenged. Timothy Morton’s solution to the conceptual and ideological separation and stratification of nature and culture is to radically restructure or eliminate “nature” from critical vocabulary when discussing ecological matters (including ecocriticism), thereby eliminating the problematic concepts that are attached to the term; moving “beyond” the conventional concept of nature as such, according to Morton, is crucial. As he puts it, “[e]cology without nature’ could mean ‘ecology without a concept of the natural’” (24). While this solution may be rudimentary or naive, Morton’s argument highlights the role of language and discourse in the shaping and perceptions of problematic relationships with the non-human

world. Significantly in the advertisement, the voice-over narration uses the word “nature” or a derivative of it five times, or an average of once every six seconds. Clorox’s repetitive stress on the term “nature” suggests its critical emptiness particularly when considering that, following Morton, conceiving the “natural” (read: non-human) world in uncritical terms may indeed contribute to its stratification and instigate its *domination*. Such emptiness is not entirely to be placed on the shoulders of postmodern capitalism’s appropriation of the term; rather it speaks to the term’s problematic epistemological origins as somehow separate *from*, but created *by* the human world.

Like Coca-Cola’s “Live Positive” and Pepsi’s “Refresh” campaign, Clorox initiated and supported a campaign in 2008 that sponsored a reverse graffiti artist to create advertisements. The purpose of the campaign was for an artist, Paul Curtis, to visit run-down, dirty, urban areas, such as tunnels, and strategically remove dirt—through such methods as pressure washing—to create a piece of artwork through the juxtaposition of cleaned spots and spots with untouched layers of dirt caked on (“Meet Moose”).⁹ The resulting work, then, functions as a form of subtle advertising; the immediate focus is on the artwork itself, but the artwork is in essence an advertisement—a commodified artwork. Indeed, while the murals undeniably transform an otherwise banal, soot-ridden area into a more captivating and aesthetically pleasing one, by utilizing the artist’s statements for commercial purposes, Clorox is commodifying an art form that is considered a “modern touchstone of urban discontent” (McAuliffe and Iveson 128). Of course, to some degree, expression of discontent is one of the stated purposes of the campaign: to function as a statement of discontentment with pollution. In this instance, though performing

⁹ While Curtis’ non-commercial reverse graffiti does function to produce an effective statement against pollution, the promotional use of his work by Clorox constitutes an alteration in the consumption of his work; it is within this alteration where the crucial transformation occurs as there is a fundamental difference between an independent artist producing graffiti (whether legally or illegally) and one being sponsored to produce as well as incorporate the brand logo in the work.

“graffiti” through commissioning reverse graffiti advertisements, Clorox’s commodification is at odds with the possible socio-political statement expressed in the graffiti as it puts commercial concerns at the forefront. Discussing the socio-political implications of graffiti and its marginalization, McAuliffe and Iveson observe that “[c]ontrary to representations of graffiti as threat, such discourses of ambivalence create room for consideration of the surprise and excitement embodied in graffiti, as an urban intervention, which contributes to distinctive communal experiences” (133). While Curtis and other artists did “reverse graffiti” before being sponsored by Clorox to create advertisements using this method, the very notion of commercial graffiti is paradoxical; commercial graffiti is the logic of graffiti come full-circle in a hyperreal manner. Clorox’s campaign functions as an advertisement that is masquerading as a counter-cultural act that puts the theory of decentralization into practice; Clorox, here, effectively blurs the distinction between “public art” that seeks to express a social critique and an advertisement that seeks to sell a product by appropriating the artistic style of graffiti, albeit a “green” version of conventional graffiti.¹⁰ Clorox’s appropriation of graffiti functions as another layer in the matrix of appropriation that is central to and characteristic of post-environmentalism as well as broader postmodern capitalism.

Contained within the campaign is another characteristic of postmodern capitalism that is a common thread throughout the present advertising campaigns: particularly, the naïve fantasy that a *corporation* will ultimately be the bearer of change necessary to combat the ills of the contemporary world (such as the ecological crises) and by consuming the “right” products, we

¹⁰ Many are less critical of the advertising campaign than I am. *Three Minds*, a website that covers digital marketing, made a post on the project, stating that “[b]y removing the soot and grime from public spaces to create the outlines of nature, Moose [Paul Curtis] makes a poignant statement about pollution in urban spaces and our reversal of the natural world” (“Clorox Graffiti”). Here, *Three Minds* effectively overlooks the purpose of the sponsored graffiti—to promote consumption.

are participating in that change.¹¹ What occurs in this fantasy is a “shrugging off” of possible challenges to capitalism as a socio-economic system; the plethora of “ethical” commodities provides the niche option to consume “ethically” and therefore suggest that if everyone were to consume ethically, there would be no need for a socio-economic system that is alternative to capitalism in order to solve environmental crises. Clorox’s “Reverse Graffiti” functions as an ideal metaphor for the static nature of the company’s environmental aims. Clorox, here, seeks not to “clean” itself by adopting a wholly environmentalist cause—especially when one views “Green Works” as only one line of cleaners amongst many—but only selectively to wash away some sections of dirt, not all of it, ultimately leaving an aesthetically pleasing picture behind. Here, the recent term that has entered popular lexicon, greenwashing, manifests itself quite literally, as Clorox aims to make a statement on pollution while simultaneously promoting the consumption of its products. There is no coherence in the actions and products of Clorox, but only options, as exemplified by the fact that they continue to manufacture bleach alongside their “Green Works” line of cleaning products. Rather than marking some sort of unwavering ecological commitment, the line of products simply helps expand its consumer demographic.

Though selling entirely different products under the same umbrella category of household commodities, Clorox’s approach to promoting its “Green Works” line is strikingly similar to both Coca-Cola’s and Pepsi’s. Moreover, Clorox here extends the logic that Žižek identifies as the internally inconsistent ideology of decaffeination that is decidedly post-ideological:

“Enjoyment is tolerated, solicited even, but on the condition that it remains healthy, that it does not threaten our psychic or biological stability: chocolate yes, but fat free; Coke yes, but diet;

¹¹ There are, of course, a number of holes in this notion, which will be addressed later. One glaring problem is that “eco” products are not accessible to everyone for several reasons, including cost. What is implicit in such a system where one “votes” with one’s money (i.e. “voting” by purchasing ethical commodities and boycotting unethical commodities) is fundamentally plutocratic and anti-democratic because the option to “vote” in this system rests solely on access to money. Moreover, this functions as a usage of embargo as a political instrument.

mayonnaise yes, but without cholesterol” (*Dreaming Dangerously* 48). Žižek’s sentiments can be restructured and extended for our purposes here: *environmentalism* is tolerated and even promoted, so long as it does not ultimately threaten capitalism. Particularly with the example of Clorox, environmentalism is framed as a simple niche market venture wherein the “ethical” consumer has the supposed choice to avoid using bleach or chemical-based cleaners that are nevertheless produced by Clorox itself. In some ways, this functions as a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the superficial qualities of contemporary capitalism’s “negotiation” with environmentalism.¹²

Conclusion: Whose Politics Are They Anyway?

It is crucial to point out that these present criticisms are not an attack against those who attempt in their everyday life to act more “sustainably” within a society whose values are founded on consumption and capitalism as hegemony, nor should they be read as such. Instead, the purpose of these criticisms, as well as the theoretical tools used and developed in these criticisms, is to expose and attack the underlying mechanisms of ideology that function in the promotion of contemporary “ethical” capitalism and its appropriation of environmentalist discourse. As the line that separates advertisements from ethico-political statements or actions becomes increasingly blurred as a result of default forms of hyperrealist, it is increasingly important to *identify* when and *where* those boundaries are being collapsed. It is important to note that this is not an attempt to suggest that all of the socio-political or socio-economic results and reverberations of postmodernism (i.e. the blurring of the divides between certain binaristic relationships) are *negative*, although I am arguing that the corporate appropriation of

¹² Although I hesitate to use the term negotiation here—largely because the discursive “ball” is in capitalism’s court here as a pervasive, hegemonic socio-economic institution when compared with environmentalism—it is effective in identifying, at least, the illusions of negotiation that contemporary capitalism seeks to create and perpetuate. This line of thought will become more apparent and pervasive when discussing post-environmentalism within the promotional sphere(s) of personal automobiles.

environmentalism is a negative instance of postmodernism. This is largely because of the discursive power-relations involved in post-environmentalism and the relentless redrawing of semiotic boundaries that define what indeed *is* environmentalism at the hands of corporations with products that are *de facto* unsustainable.

Problematically, corporations such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Clorox are viciously co-opting environmentalism—an ideology inherently *against* consumption in a capitalist sense—for the paradoxical purpose of *promoting the consumption* of their respective products. They accomplish this sleight of hand by selectively and strategically displacing the discourse of environmentalism through appropriation and (re)presenting it in a manner that is antithetical to its aims. As corporations such as these ones continue to blur the lines between advertisement and hegemony-challenging, political statement, (environmental) activist and consumerist, the politically necessary distinctions between the two become not only difficult and unclear, but impossible. The dichotomy collapses in on itself, amalgamating in a *mélange* of saturated pseudo-politics. This attack against hegemony-challenging environmentalism is being carried out most explicitly within the ideological battlefield¹³ of popular culture, as evidenced throughout this chapter and the thesis on the whole. What results from this attack is a discourse that is inarguably derivative of environmentalism, but ultimately *against* environmentalism: post-environmentalism.

Post-environmentalism can in some ways be understood as an extension of the rise of “anti-advertising” from the mid-twentieth century. In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank highlights this discursive tendency within advertising that is attributed to Bill Bernbach: “He invented what we might call anti-advertising: a style which harnessed public mistrust of

¹³ The use of the phrase “ideological battlefield” here is a nod to Žižek’s use of the phrase to characterize Hollywood as an “ideological battlefield” (*Living in the End Times* 54).

consumerism—perhaps the most powerful cultural tendency of the age—to consumerism itself” (55). Post-environmentalism, however, is a much more (passively) aggressive version of Bernbach’s “anti-advertising.” Indeed, while both concepts contain a paradoxical element wherein attitudes are fostered to promote their antithesis, post-environmentalism drastically, and immediately, obscures environmentalism as a radical ideology by shifting its socio-political goals in on itself. Like McRobbie’s post-feminism, which can also be seen as a hyper-effective form of anti-advertising wherein corporations utilize aspects of feminism to promote products while simultaneously undermining feminism’s aims, post-environmentalism produces a *backlash* against environmentalism. By paradoxically utilizing aspects of an anti-consumptive ideology to promote consumption, post-environmentalism glosses over and effectively depoliticizes environmentalism.

Although scholars like Žižek argue that environmental politics must be informed by larger ideologies—ecologically qualified ideologies from green anarchism to green Zionism do speak to some sort of truth in his assertions—it is important to recognize fundamental threads in environmental and green politics. Žižek argues that “[e]cology ... is never ‘ecology as such’, it is always enchain[ed] in a specific series of equivalences” (*Tragedy* 12). Žižek’s statement here certainly works against a notion of eco-capitalism, but it works against forms of legitimate environmentalism as well. There is in Žižek’s writing a glossing over of fundamental issues related to environmentalism; while there are varying “ecologies,” a consistent thread in *legitimate* environmentalism is a radical questioning of perpetual economic and industrial growth as well as unfettered consumption. In this equation, the antagonisms between capitalism, which always already seeks to maximize growth in a number of ways, and environmentalism, which questions such a motive, are quite clear. By creating technologies (such as plant-based plastics)

and promotional campaigns that seek to express some level of environmentalist tendencies, corporations such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Clorox are utilizing environmentalism as a promotional platform.¹⁴ What occurs is an appeal to those who are or would like to be viewed as environmentally conscious—the “demographic” of eco-capitalism—by suggesting that through the consumption of their respective products, one either contributes to creating less waste than if one was using traditional versions of a particular commodity, or that by consuming such and such a product, one positively contributes to an environmentalist organization (such as WWF). The logic involved in this process, to use a psychoanalytic metaphor from an environmentalist perspective, involves the treating of a *symptom* and not the larger problem itself.¹⁵ Shifting back to Bauman’s observations, the healthy functioning of contemporary consumerist society *rests* on perpetual consumption, which is always already antagonistic toward environmentalism. These pervasive technologies and promotional strategies *acknowledge* that a change is necessary, but rather than challenge hegemonic patterns of consumption, and production, they simply *mask* the very prevalent issues surrounding global ecological crises and, in turn, seek to profit from that masking.

¹⁴ Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Clorox are not the only corporations that produce household consumption that are appropriating environmentalism and environmentalist discourse. However, by focusing on the three corporations’ advertisements as case studies, this section has sought to survey the ways in which postmodern “ethical” capitalism appropriates environmentalism and the political ramifications of that appropriation.

¹⁵ The “symptom” metaphor is consistently threaded throughout Žižek’s oeuvre with regard to contemporary capitalism, particularly with reference to the United States bank bailouts in 2008 in *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*. This logic identifies a larger issue within the functioning of contemporary capitalism—when capitalism’s logic (relentless growth) is played out to an excessive point and “fails” the public, the failure is understood in terms of symptomatic issues rather than entirely structural ones. Such a representation of capitalism’s “failures” ultimately redirects criticisms pointed towards the larger structures and onto the finer details while leaving the larger structure intact. This is homologous with the treatment of environmentalism within contemporary capitalism; if popular perception sees eco/ethical capitalism as legitimately addressing possible ecological catastrophes, the larger structures of capitalism remain unchallenged. Discussing the mindset that produces this sort of symptomatic logic, Žižek states:

The self-propelling circulation of Capital thus remains more than ever the ultimate Real of our lives, a beast that by definition cannot be controlled, since it itself controls our activity, blinding us to even the most obvious dangers we are courting. It is one big fetishistic denial: ‘I know very well the risks I am courting, even the inevitability of the final collapse, but nonetheless ... I can put off the collapse a little bit longer, take on a little bit more risk, and so on indefinitely.’ (*Tragedy* 37)

Quite tellingly, Mark Fisher points toward the grave problematics involved in the promotion of anti-capitalism through capitalism when he states that “[c]orporate anti-capitalism wouldn’t matter if it could be differentiated from an authentic anti-capitalist movement” (14); here, one can substitute “anti-capitalism” with “environmentalism” for an equally grave illustration. Indeed, the fundamental aims of capitalism are at odds with environmentalism, as Fred Magdoff points out in “Ecological Civilization”: “[t]he accumulation of capital, the driving and motivating force of capitalism, leads naturally to many consequences that harm the environment. The system proceeds assuming—contrary to all evidence—unlimited resources (including cheap energy) and unlimited natural ‘sinks’ for wastes generated” (9). Magdoff points out what has been argued (and will be argued) consistently throughout this thesis: regardless of attempts to incorporate environmentalist attitudes into contemporary capitalism, with profit as the driving force behind its ideological presuppositions, environmental regard will *always* take a back seat. It can be argued that were eco-products not profitable (by appealing to a niche demographic—environmentalists), they would not be developed. To appropriate and obscure environmentalism so that it “fits” into the structures of capitalism, then, is not only a paradoxical endeavour—which is often not immediately recognizable as such—it is arguably impossible. Without another classification, however, there is an understandable risk that this bastardized version of environmentalism will become indistinguishable from legitimate environmentalism. The consequences of such a collapse are not limited to environmental politics, but to radical politics on the whole; as Fisher ultimately points out above, if it becomes impossible to distinguish between commercial anti-capitalism and legitimate anti-capitalism, there effectively becomes no conceptual difference between the two as anti-capitalism, then, cannot be conceived *outside* of the commercial sphere. By creating and disseminating a counter-

discourse *against* the appropriations outlined here, the intellectual groundwork is established for challenging the privatization and depoliticization not of only environmentalism, but of broader radical politics in general. Moreover, it is significant that post-environmentalism is not an isolated discourse; it reverberates throughout promotional and cultural spheres, as we will see in the following chapters, while simultaneously feeding into larger socio-cultural and socio-political arenas.

Chapter Two

Frontiers and Ecological Fatalities: Ideologies of Personal Automobiles, Socio-Ethical Capital, and Fuelling Post-Environmentalism

What the road really was, [Oedipa] fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain.

THOMAS PYNCHON, *THE CRYING OF LOT 49*

Thomas Pynchon's freeway metaphor in the above epigraph symbolically highlights a number of pertinent issues regarding urbanization, transportation, and, ultimately, *automobility* in North America. On the one hand, the metaphor expresses implicit naturalization of such mechanistic developments as cityscapes and freeways, which suggests that they have become socio-culturally banal—a “fact” of everyday existence. On the other, the epigraph analogizes that very banality with drug-saturated imagery; the reliance on freeways, for Pynchon's Oedipa, supplies a drug-induced pleasure for a city, which veils its pain-ridden stasis. Indeed, however “nourishing” these freeways are, they structurally function as an addiction. Despite Pynchon's elaborate metaphor, there is a crucial element missing which completes the image: *cars*. Adding this missing element to Pynchon's passage completes the illustration—cars are the drug that flows through the freeway “veins” into the urban city-junkie. This addition, aside from arguably enriching Pynchon's already illustrative metaphor, functions to destabilize the hegemonic view of personal automobiles as the foremost symbols of American freedom and individualism. For those who seek to challenge the pervasiveness of automobiles in contemporary society, particularly because of their ecologically damaging qualities even outside of the spheres of oil politics, the analogy of cars as the active component of a drug (in Pynchon's metaphor, most likely heroin) is

quite apt. The drug is addictive, but not without detrimental, adverse effects; pleasure is provided, in lieu of pain, but at what cost?

Listing the sociological implications of automobiles, Urry states in his essay, “Inhabiting the Car,” that automobiles are, among other aspects, “the major item of *individual consumption* after housing which provides status to its owner/user through its sign values” as well as “the single most important cause of *environmental resource-use* resulting from the range and scale of material, space and power used in the manufacture of cars, roads and car-only environments” (18). Urry and other cultural critics label this ideology of automobiles as a form of “automobility.”¹ What Urry ultimately highlights is that automobiles are not simply neutral machines that function in a utilitarian manner, but instead are quite elaborately entrenched in contemporary socio-political existence. An automobile is not simply a human-created tool that aids in performing a task efficiently; as Urry puts it, “[t]he car is not simply a means of covering distances between A and B” (18). Rather, cars can be viewed in terms of hybridity as the human interaction with them is not simply utilitarian and involves a level of interaction between the driver and the vehicle.² As a result, environmentalists’ criticisms against the prevalence of personal automobiles in contemporary

¹ This term is used to identify the sociological paradigm of personal automobiles in the seminal collection of essays by a number of scholars, such as Urry himself, entitled *Against Automobility*. Urry elaborates on the term, citing Haraway and Thrift:

I use ‘automobility’ here to capture a double-sense. On the one hand, ‘auto’ refers reflexively to the humanist self, such as the meaning of ‘auto’ in auto-biography or autoerotic. On the other hand, ‘auto’ refers to objects or machines that possess a capacity for movement, as expressed by automatic, automaton and especially automobile. This double resonance of ‘auto’ is suggestive of how the car-driver is a ‘hybrid’ assemblage, not simply of autonomous humans but simultaneously of machines, roads, buildings, signs and entire cultures of mobility. (18)

Urry’s argument here is that, from their inception and semiotically, automobiles are always already hybrid; they are both mechanistic, and highly integrated into the human experience.

² For a somewhat hyperbolic example of the illustration of hybridity between vehicles and humans, see J.G. Ballard’s 1973 novel *Crash*, which follows the activity of a group of people who have a fetish for car accidents.

society³ are not only in opposition to the use of a machine that is linked to high levels of pollution, they are opposed to an entire (sub)culture whose central and fundamental ideology is based on a perceived freedom.

In terms of the construction of identity, the automobile, along with its resource-heavy by-products such as highways and parking lots, is a culturally ingrained symbol of North American society. In his 2008 book, *The Republic of Drivers*, Cotton Seiler links socio-historical American Frontier ideology, seen by many as the foundation of popularly perceived American values, to the emergence of the automobile—a new frontier ideology. The point here is that the culture of the automobile in America is, arguably, parallel to the hegemonic culture of American values in broader terms. Economic liberalism and the views of “mobility as a right” (Seiler 22-23) have always already been in conjunction with the developments, and promotion, of the automobile, particularly with its entrenchment in socio-cultural and socio-political American life since the 1920s. American values do not reflect its automobile culture, or vice-versa; rather, they play off of and significantly influence each other in a form of Derridean negotiation in the sense that they rely on each other to maintain their constituents. In many ways, the culture of the personal automobile was, and continues to be, created and perpetuated through advertisements and mass media. It is inarguable that contemporary late capitalism, mass culture, and automobiles have been inextricably linked since their inception.⁴ The car, historically situated within the development of mass

³ The research on this subject is insurmountable, but see Peter Freund and George Martin's *The Ecology of the Automobile* for an extended discussion.

⁴ Gartman points out Henry Ford's significant role in the creation of mass production as well as mass consumption in “Three Ages of the Automobile:”

As regulation theorists like Michel Aglietta (1979) argue, the new processes of mass production required a new mode of mass consumption to distribute and consume all of the goods pouring off specialized machines and assembly lines. They label the combination of the new organization of production with the new organization of consumption Fordism, for they attribute the *initiation of both* to Henry Ford. In 1914, shortly after introducing the assembly line, Ford instituted the Five Dollar Day

production, is simultaneously situated within a matrix of commodity fetishism as well as its own epistemological crux. Andrew Wernick notes the “meta-promotional” characteristics of automobiles: “besides their function as transport, cars have always had a promotional role for users themselves. Parked at home, like furniture, like the domicile itself, they project a sense of their owner’s relative social standing” (70). Here, Wernick emphasizes the technological role of automobiles, as a means of transportation, as well as their explicitly *promotional* and socio-cultural characteristics.

The motif of progress and the notion that technology will solve the issues created by unrestrained development and unfettered economic growth are not restricted to automobiles, but there is a pervasive socio-historical link between ideologies of teleological human progress and the development of automobiles. Importantly, the cultures of scientism in general are often seen as being at odds with environmentalism,⁵ as the term “progress” is often used to justify and perpetuate domination of the environment (Smith 70). Wernick terms this the “technology complex” and notes that “the spread of cars rapidly transformed the whole ecology of life, creating massive dependent industries, road-systems and transformed cities; while at the individual level, it accelerated private and occupational mobility, altering our whole sense of time and space” (71). Ultimately, this construction of automobiles as “symbols of Modernity, Technology, and Progress, was never *entirely*

program, drastically increasing the wages of his workers and thus creating thousands of new consumers for his cars. But this program was an attempt not merely to create more consumers but also to produce more stable and compliant workers. The wage increase was implemented largely to quell the wave of worker discontent instigated by his new, more intense and exploitative production methods. In return for the Five Dollar Day, Ford demanded of workers acquiescence to mass-production methods as well as a stable home life centered around major consumer durables that made them dependent on their high-paying jobs (Meyer, 1981). (177)

⁵ Although the anti-scientism position within the environmentalism movement is largely expressed by deep ecologists and primitivists such as Derrick Jensen and John Zerzan, there is also a rather large amount of scepticism towards ideologies of “progress” within the contemporary environmentalist movement on the whole. For an extended discussion of this scepticism and its relationship to both primitivism and broader ecological/environmentalist ethics, see the chapter entitled “Primitivism” (65-99) in Mick Smith’s 2011 book *Against Ecological Sovereignty*.

arbitrary” (Wernick 71, emphasis added). As is made clear by Wernick’s use of capital letters here, while the arbitrariness of the automobile’s association with such loaded terms may be contested, the terms themselves do not have far reaching, uniformly accepted significations. What can be said of these terms is that they are largely contextually rooted in a socio-historical moment; in other words, what defined the ideology of capital-T Technology several years ago is not the same as it is now.

The “technology complex”—which has shifting definitions given its socio-historical context—that situates such commodities as automobiles and computers often converges with its promotional aspects, and, as a result, its larger symbolic meaning. Like the previous chapter’s focus, advertising campaigns that promote “environmentally ethical” household consumption items or behaviour by those very corporations that promote “environmentally ethical” behaviour (such as Coca Cola’s “commitment to nature” examined in Chapter One), car corporations are extending the trend by perpetuating post-environmentalism. In several ways, this is unsurprising: as noted earlier, automobiles and mass promotional culture are historically linked. In North America, amongst the largest grossing automobile corporations are Ford, Chevrolet, and Toyota. In their own particular ways, Ford, Chevrolet, and Toyota construct a discourse that suggests that the current ecological crises—global climate change, and so on—can not only be solved by technological means, but that by simply having a regard for fuel consumption, the environment will somehow be positively affected. Such a suggestion fails to recognize the necessity for a change in behaviour to properly address environmental issues as each corporation attempts to appeal to “ethical” consumers. Moreover, many of the “eco-friendly” technologies that are purported by automobile manufacturers are promoted through their *cost-saving* effects. This reveals a tension between

the ethical discourse constructed by these corporations and the reality of motivations behind curbing fuel consumption and the promotion of that curbing. This is not to suggest that environmentalist action must be inherently altruistic, but certainly this suggests that there is a more complex rather than simplistic dynamic at work concerning the promotional qualities of environmentalism within the discourse surrounding automobiles.

Although this chapter will largely focus on hybrid and other electric vehicles, which utilize battery power as well as traditional gasoline, I will also examine advertisements for traditional automobiles which focus on fuel-economy; what becomes apparent is the way in which each respective corporation frames its vehicle's environmentally positive qualities as simply a buying point that will save the user money, effectively commodifying ecological ethics while simultaneously side-stepping criticisms of personal automobiles as ecologically destructive. This superficial utilization of environmentally ethical discourse undercuts the aims of legitimate environmentalism and functions to construct and perpetuate post-environmentalism. As the previous chapter's advertisements suggest, the answer to ecological ills and crises is not to alter North American lifestyles; rather, as technology continues to "progress," the paradoxical solution to this issue is not less consumption, but more. Whether or not this is "true" is not the aim of the present analyses. Instead, this chapter seeks to expose the ways in which Ford, Chevrolet, and Toyota construct a discourse that frames their automobiles as not only environmentally more "friendly" than previous vehicles or their competitor's contemporary vehicles, but one which extols their vehicles as the solution to the problems of pollution, and so on. Significantly, for many, if not all, strands of environmentalism, there is a fundamental focus on decreasing or altering patterns of consumption that have become hegemonic in contemporary society, as well as a general

scepticism towards ideologies of scientism. In other words, challenging consumption is one of the features, if not *the* defining feature, of environmentalism's agenda and aims.

However, this tenet of environmentalism is explicitly glossed over as ecological regard and ethics are framed as reasons to purchase their respective products, to consume.

Dissonance and Its Discontents: Ford, Hegemonic Consumption, and Postmodern Capitalism

Of the corporations that produced the promotional campaigns analyzed in this chapter, Ford is unique in relation to its role in the historical development of the automobile and mass production in general. Indeed, Ford is credited with producing the first “low-priced” car, the Model T, as well as dramatically innovating production through the assembly line, to which the popularization of automobiles, as a result of its relative affordability due to mass production, is attributed (Seiler 38). In many ways, then, Ford was not only a frontrunner in establishing the ideologies of automobility, but a fundamental constructor of them, as discussed above.⁶ Michael L. Berger correlates Ford's position as an initiator of automobility when he argues in *The Automobile in American History and Culture* that “[t]he Model T was really more than a car; it was a true legend that directly touched the lives of millions of Americans for over two decades” (8). Of course, as is argued here, *every* automobile is more than an automobile as such; automobiles are always already situated within a symbolic matrix of signification. What is significant here is that Ford is conventionally accredited with established ideologies that continue to pervade promotional automobile discourse contra environmentalism.

⁶ Particularly, of course, the low(er) cost car helped establish the notion of automobiles as a democratizing commodity (Seiler 39).

Recently, Ford has begun promoting a technological innovation that seeks to reduce fuel consumption, while not sacrificing engine performance, which they call “EcoBoost.” According to Ford, “EcoBoost” is a technology that has “[m]ore power, better performance and reduced CO₂ emissions” (“Ford’s Vehicle Technology”). Semiotically, the trademarked name of the technology, “EcoBoost,” attempts to construct an association with the green movement as it amalgamates signifiers of environmentality (“eco”) with performance (“boost”). The nomenclature here suggests not only a solution to the well-vocalized issue of sacrificing performance for less pollution,⁷ but also an alliance with the environmentally conscious consumer. Indeed, the most appealing quality of the technology, according to Ford, is that “[i]t also happens to be *better* for the environment” (“Ford’s Vehicle Technology”). The claim of being “better” for the environment is a problematic one; it is a comparative claim that is effectively void and tautological without its base of comparison made explicit. Moreover, the phrase itself suggests that the environmentally positive qualities of this technology are an afterthought. For anyone legitimately concerned about the prevalence of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions and other pollutants resulting from increasing automobile use, simply being “better” on fuel than other vehicles does not address the gravity of the situation. Ford—like Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Clorox, and other corporations—constructs a discourse largely based on scientism that attempts to reconcile grounded environmentalist criticisms with the promotion of its products. Such a discourse attempts to dissolve these criticisms by superficially absorbing them; if one absorbs Ford’s efforts uncritically, it seems as though Ford is committed to ecologically bettering the world. This is, for a number of reasons, paradoxical, but its effects ultimately undermine socio-political challenges to the

⁷ This issue is at the heart of the debate surrounding the development of more environmentally friendly vehicles which can be seen in Cotton Seiler’s *Republic of Drivers* and Peter Freund and George Martin’s *Ecology of the Automobile*, among others.

hegemonic patterns of consumption (and production) that, according to such scholars as Carolyn Merchant, author of a seminal book *Radical Ecology*, must be altered drastically in order to combat the current and future ecological crises. By addressing these criticisms with the utmost of corporate optimism, Ford superficially panders to the environmentally conscious. The message is clear: buying Ford situates a consumer within an environmentally ethical matrix, which provides Ford with a degree of social and cultural capital that has serious political ramifications.⁸ Indeed, while such strategies are in line with Bourdieu's conception of social capital, they also extend the logic into another sphere—the sphere of ethics; in this sense, it is beneficial to differentiate this as a form of socio-*ethical* capital. Ford, here, simultaneously attempts to draw in conscientious consumers while also limiting what can be conceived as ethical into the spheres of market and economy.

On some levels, the superficiality of Ford's discourse of environmental ethics is unsurprising; as previously discussed, a major tenet of environmental ethics is to advocate reduced consumption, which is inherently at odds with any multinational corporation's goals: unfettered growth and profit. However, the aim here is not simply to identify its ideological superficialities, but rather, to point towards the notion that Ford's promotional endeavours

⁸ In *The Forms of Capital*, Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose reacknowledgment of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space. (248-9)

In this sense, Ford, as well as other corporations considering the discussion above which highlights automobile's social roles, places itself within a social capital framework wherein the consumers can use Ford to reflect their ethical positions.

are part of a larger trend within capitalism's ideological framework that seeks to acknowledge politico-ideological challenges (here, environmentalist ethics and politics), obscure those challenges, and incorporate them into a discourse that utilizes the obscured ideology (here, post-environmentalism) to *promote* consumption. Indeed, Ford's ecological commitments are simply one of many advertising angles—many of which are at odds with one another. For example, recent advertisements for the Ford F-150, narrated by the brash, patriotic comedian and actor Denis Leary, envisage the vehicle to purport “tough guy,” masculinist signification. While environmentalist dogma does not suggest that one cannot be both a “tough guy” and ecologically conscious, the sensitivity purported in the previous manifestation of “environmentally ethical” Ford is at odds with this “tough guy” Ford, which results in a short circuit. This tension suggests that its lip-service to environmentalist attitudes is an attempt to pander to a demographic rather than take seriously criticisms of the automobile industry's environmentally damaging behaviour. It is precisely this disjointed schizophrenia that characterizes postmodernism (*qua* Fredric Jameson) and, in turn, contemporary postmodern capitalism.⁹

It is also important to note that, while Ford promotes technologies to provide through partnerships with such companies as SunPower,¹⁰ its focus on fuel efficiency is largely promoted as a money-saving feature. Again, while possibly unsurprising, this focus is at odds with its earlier publicized claims that “Ford is focused on minimizing the environmental impact of our vehicles and operations” (“Ford Sustainability”). The addendum to this

⁹ In *Postmodernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson states that “it is hard to see how human activity under third, or postmodern, stage of capitalism could elude or evade this very general formula, although some of postmodernism's ideal images—schizophrenia above all—are clearly calculated to rebuke it and to stand as unassimilable and unsubsumable under it” (333). Jameson highlights here the ways in which schizophrenia as such is an integral quality of postmodern capitalism, which is reflected in several of the advertisements throughout not only this chapter, but the entire thesis.

¹⁰ SunPower is a manufacturer of solar panels.

quotation should read thus: “so long as it remains profitable.” In another 2012 advertisement that is part of the above-mentioned Denis Leary campaign, the focus is on gas prices. Leary states in the voice-over that “when gas prices jump, you still gotta work ... how ‘bout cuttin’ back on gas” (“Jump”). The advertisement continues to tout the vehicle’s exceptional gas mileage. Here, the advertisement lacks even a superficial acknowledgement of Ford’s previously promoted commitment to sustainability. Again, amongst the plethora of demographics that Ford seeks to reach, the eco-conscious consumer is like any other. This cognitive dissonance remains unacknowledged by Ford as its advertisements essentially gloss over the very serious implications of environmental politics with regard to automobile culture. By implementing environmentalist discourse so haphazardly and at-will, Ford undermines legitimate ecological ethics and politics; Ford effectively constructs environmentalism as a simple consumer-identity, like the hyper-masculine identity Ford panders to in its brash advertisements featuring Denis Leary. Ethics and politics—in this case environmental ethics and politics—then converge with promotion, consumption, and ultimately, capitalism.

On Ford’s *YouTube* channel, there are a number of web-exclusive videos that purport Ford’s environmental commitments through green project funding and the development of hybrid and electrical vehicles. The green project-funding contests function similarly to the previously discussed Pepsi campaign, “Refresh,” wherein Ford chooses the best “green” project from contest entrants and provides them with funding for the project, essentially functioning as a pseudo-Non-Governmental Organization. One particular contest was Ford’s “Educate to Escape” wherein a winning school is awarded a “green makeover” worth \$250,000 USD (“Ford Takes Green to School”). Ford’s benevolence here is framed in a

manner that suggests that Ford has picked up the proverbial pieces of the state's failure; it not only suggests that the state is simply ineffective in implementing significant changes towards sustainability, but that the future of education *qua* sustainability rests on private industry's benevolence. Discussing Douglas Coupland's 1991 book *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, a novel which has much to say regarding consumption and contemporary consumer culture, G.P. Lainsbury argues that "[t]he realities of living in a postindustrial, posthistorical, late capitalist world have eroded *belief* in the state as entity, as organizing principle" (238, emphasis added). The erosion explicated by Lainsbury here only becomes stronger as appropriated ethical discourse becomes increasingly central to the promotional platforms for postmodern capitalism.

As a result of Ford's superficial appropriation of environmentalist discourse, then, environmentalism functions as an aspect of brand-image, as opposed to a political tendency that seeks to question the power structures which promote systems that convey unsustainable patterns of consumption and unfettered growth. Rather than seriously address criticisms, Ford adds empty environmentalist rhetoric to its line of promotional campaigns by touting its commitment to "sustainability." While Ford is producing vehicles that use up considerably less fossil fuel than previous models, which *does* contribute to less emissions and pollution, it does so to fit a marketing niche, rather than, for example, to make a radical change in the ways it manufactures its vehicles. Indeed, Ford offers these models as *alternatives* to conventional vehicles; while it can be argued that Ford is pioneering the development of new technologies that seek to reduce or eliminate consumption of fossil fuels, it is still not altering any larger unsustainable patterns. Moreover, Ford's usage of environmentalist discourse—including such platitudes as "sustainability" and trademarked neologisms like "EcoBoost"—

seeks to reconcile diametrically opposed ethico-political standpoints: environmentalism, which largely seeks to challenge conventionally accepted patterns of consumption, and capitalism, which seeks to maximize growth and profit without restraint.

The Environmental Unconscious: Chevrolet, the Logic of Ecology, and Faith in Progress

Chevrolet, a subsidiary brand of General Motors, is a popular domestic, American brand of personal automobiles and one of the automobile manufacturers—along with Ford and the now defunct Chrysler—labeled as “the Big Three,” which are the three major American automobile manufacturers located in Detroit (Berger 11). In 2012, Chevrolet released the first commercially available, fully electric vehicle in North America: the Chevrolet Volt. What is important to note, however, is that General Motors, in the 1970s, had developed a prototype for a commercially available electric vehicle; the 2006 documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?* outlines the development and destruction of the prototypes, the EV1, with a focus on California’s “Zero Emission” policy initially implemented in 1990. What the documentary highlights are the extremely *political* aspects of the automobile industry by suggesting, among other reasons, that a conspiracy involving oil-industry funded “consumer” groups ultimately led to the failure and destruction of the electric vehicles (*Who Killed the Electric Car?*). While the electric automobile, regardless of when it was developed, is not consistent with the radical shifts in patterns of production and consumption that many environmentalists call for, the fact that the electric vehicle was conceived and commercially viable more than a decade before speaks to the superficiality of Chevrolet’s current platforms regarding their ecological commitments. Indeed, relatively recent ecological commitments are significant when considering Chevrolet’s and, in turn,

General Motors' contemporary approach to the marketing of the Volt, as well as the *marketing* of their commitment to the environment and sustainability. Before launching the campaigns touting their ecological consciousness, General Motors and Chevrolet quite brazenly revealed that ecological commitments were not the result of some sort of ethical benevolence, but rather a promotion tool; had environmental concerns outweighed corporate interest, electrical vehicles would have been developed further.¹¹ This contradiction, which is located within the tensions between corporate reality or profitability and environmental consciousness, is exemplary of post-environmentalism *par excellence*.

The 2011 follow up documentary, *Revenge of the Electric Car*, focuses again on the current state of contemporary electric vehicle; rather than scold the automobile industry, particularly GM, for its antagonistic relationship with technological ingenuity which sought to diminish reliance on oil, the documentary highlights the domestic automobile industry's shift in perspective. This shift is highlighted through a focus on, among other corporations including Nissan, GM's president, Bob Lutz's own personal transition from someone who was antagonistic towards electric vehicles into an individual who supports the development of them. Bob Lutz states that he "considers [himself] an environmentalist *within reason*" (*Revenge*, emphasis added). Lutz's statement embodies the dynamics of post-environmentalism as it raises a string of crucial questions, such as what Lutz means by "environmentalist" and what limits he considers to be "within reason." It is not difficult, nor is it inappropriate, to speculate on the boundaries of Lutz's purported, newly found environmentalism. "Within reason" arguably suggests that environmentalism is all well and good until it starts calling for changes that seek to *challenge* lifestyles of consumption that

¹¹ As *Who Killed the Electric Car?* points out, other automobile corporations, like Ford and Toyota, also scrapped their electric vehicle prototypes.

have become engrained in North American culture and society. While Lutz's position may be that of the business-minded "realist," it is problematic considering the implications of the qualification of his statement; he feels it necessary to make qualifications and in doing so marks other environmentalists as *lacking* that reason which he possesses.

Like Ford, Chevrolet has developed a term to label its approach to sustainability and ecological ethics. Chevrolet's term, "EcoLogic," synthesizes the words "ecology" and "logic" in an attempt to literally brand their ethics.¹² This semiotic and linguistic manipulation is significant in the construction of this promotional discourse because the portmanteau places the concept in a signifying chain, where all associated signifieds of each respective word, ecology and logic, are packed into the term and thus attributed to Chevrolet as an entity. Chevrolet summarizes the philosophy behind generating its nomenclature: "We're dedicated to seeking out the most responsible and beneficial innovations for tomorrow's world – *but never at the expense of today*" ("ECOLOGIC", emphasis added). Here, Chevrolet makes explicit its unwavering belief in technological "progress" as the solution to the current crises in the human and non-human world(s) as well as an acknowledgement of its unwillingness to alter or even challenge its own practices. Indeed, Chevrolet's elaboration that they will never let their sustainability be "at the expense of today" points toward the looming tension in sustainability debates between those who call for radical changes in patterns of production and consumption that are promoted by contemporary culture, which includes environmentalists, and those who believe that such patterns are not an issue, but rather, the efficiency of those processes is; such logic creates an intellectual foundation that suggests technology can provide the solutions. Problematically,

¹² It is important to note that, unlike Ford, Chevrolet has not copyrighted or trademarked the term although it is unclear why.

much of Chevrolet's rhetoric is, like Ford's, comparative. If radical changes in production and consumption are deemed necessary, comparing efficiency—a problematic term in and of itself—with that of past technologies becomes a *de facto* tautological argument. Moreover, while Chevrolet makes their commitment to sustainability quite clear, it frames their efforts in terms of simply thinking: "It means doing our part by building the most fuel-efficient vehicles, in eco-friendly facilities, with more recycled content, and fewer carbon emissions. It means thinking clear and thinking clean. That's Ecologic" ("ECOLOGIC"). Ecological commitment then seems to be the only field where Chevrolet is comfortable with the notion that simply "thinking" will bring about radical change. This discourse functions on two levels; it panders to liberal environmentalists who believe that simply being conscious of the environment is enough, and it promotes a lack of action by suggesting that consuming the right products will change the world. For Zygmunt Bauman, this desire is a tell-tale mark of a *consumerist* society; a society where consumerism is implicit and complicit in every sphere of life, including, here, ethics. Bauman's observations that "[t]he 'society of consumers,' in other words, stands for the kind of society that promotes, encourages or enforces the choice of a consumerist lifestyle and life strategy and dislikes all alternative cultural options" (*Consuming Life* 53) echoes both Wernick's as well as Featherstone's earlier arguments about promotional cultures and postmodern consumerism. Indeed, Wernick's early 1990s argument that "[b]y addressing individuals always as potential customers, and so attributing to them *a priori* a social identity linked firmly to that role, advertising builds the standpoint of consumption into the design of its every text" (35). Featherstone's larger arguments regarding the "aestheticization of everyday life" (65) highlight the ways in which individuals are increasingly conceived by larger institutions as existing exclusively within a matrix of

consumerism *as* consumers. However, Bauman's and, as a result, Wernick's and Featherstone's logic must be pushed further; as this thesis argues, contemporary postmodern capitalism along with the culture it constructs and perpetuates not only *dislikes* alternatives to the consumerist society, it strategically nullifies those alternatives.¹³

To mark their commitments to sustainable development in their business, Chevrolet has an entire *YouTube* playlist entitled "Chevrolet Eco—Clean Energy Initiative." The playlist contains advertisements that are shot in a range of formats, from documentary to animation ("Chevrolet Eco"). One particular animated advertisement, in a minimalist, "infographic" style states: "what if no one cared about carbon dioxide? After all, we create it when we breathe, when we drive ... even cats, dogs, and cows produce it." The advertisement continues: "but scientists say that too much of it is bad for the environment" ("Chevy Carbon Reduction"). Ultimately, the advertisement, along with the others in the grouped *YouTube* playlist, suggests that the (over)production of carbon dioxide can be solved by "creative ways" and through discussion in a particularly paternal manner, which is the result of animation and narration that mimics children's cartoons. This advertisement, then, functions as an "advertisement *without* advertising" wherein the commercial is constructed to resemble the discourse of a public service announcement; however, instead of ending with the information and logo of a non-profit organization, it concludes with a Chevrolet logo. There are a number of problematics within and extraneous to this advertisement. By emphasizing that vehicles are simply one of the myriad of ways in which carbon dioxide is produced, vehicle's significant role in the releasing of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is essentially overlooked. This is a conscious effort on behalf of the advertisement as it naturalizes emissions of carbon dioxide, even when produced by automobiles, which is

¹³ This argument is elaborated on at length in Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*

misleading for a number of reasons. Indeed, as Lee Schipper acknowledges in a study entitled “Automobile Fuel; Economy and CO₂ Emissions in Industrialized Countries: Troubling Trends in 2005/6,” “[s]ince most all fuel is from oil products or natural gas, automobiles also account for a significant amount of global release of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas associated with climate change”(1).¹⁴ Schipper’s assertion here is directly at odds with the advertisement, which attempts to disregard the prominent anthropogenic sources of carbon dioxide emissions.¹⁵ To invoke Adorno and Horkheimer, the advertisement also extends the above-discussed narrative of capitalism’s monopoly on the production of culture, creativity, and, in turn, *education*; such a monopoly threatens legitimate *public* discourse wherein corporate sponsored announcements and public service announcements amalgamate in an indistinguishable collapse.

In a recent campaign centred on the Volt’s (lack of) fuel consumption entitled “Gas Station,” father and son characters question why a Volt is at a gas station if it is electric. Importantly, the focus of the advertisements is *not* on the environmental implications of low fuel consumption. Moreover, the father and son questioners are presented as pestering, unintelligent, and immature as the Volt owner semi-frustratingly answers their string of questions. In one of the two main advertisements, the father points out to his son, in a relatively aggressive tone, that the Volt driver is “just here to rub our nose in the fact that you don’t have to buy gas” (“Gas Station 2”). While the driver defends himself and denies the

¹⁴ It is also important to note that Schipper concludes that “technology has reduced the fuel required for a given car horsepower and weight markedly, but in the US (and to some extent Europe) this has been offset by greater new car power and weight” (46). Though published in 2008 and focusing on 2005/6, Schipper’s work highlights that the recent advances (if any) in fuel economy are insignificant, an observation at odds with the rhetoric from all three, particularly Ford and Chevrolet as domestic car producers, corporations.

¹⁵ Moreover, even the use of animals as an example of carbon dioxide producers is misleading as the advertisement does not distinguish between livestock and wild animals; indeed, livestock could also be considered as human-made emissions because they are a commodity first and living creature second. There is a concern over livestock contribution to greenhouse gases and a 2009 UK-based study notes that “livestock-related emissions are significant” (Garnett 493).

claim, this rhetoric frames the driver as snobby or boastful. This is a promotional strategy wherein the audience is meant to envy such reactions from onlookers: if you owned a Volt, similar interactions that invoke onlooker's envy would happen to you. This promotional strategy metacritically exercises and builds from Wernick's observations that automobiles are simultaneously symbolic "markers of identity," such as clothing, as well as technologically functional ones (70). It is important that the advertisements are structured around this interaction with no mention of the environment or similar rhetoric seen on Chevrolet's website as well as in other advertisements. Again, as with Ford's approaches, this conscious allusion to vehicles as "markers of identity" reveals a certain lack of sincerity with regard to Chevrolet's commitments to sustainable development.

Chevrolet occupies a unique position with regard to the larger discussion at hand as the producer of the first commercially available, electric personal automobile. Indeed, even after suppressing the development of its first electric vehicle as outlined in *Who Killed the Electric Car*, General Motors flip-flopped and released the Chevrolet Volt roughly a decade later. Rather than pushing to make a significant change in the automobile industry with the original electric vehicle, Chevrolet succumbed to internal and external political and economic pressures; however, Chevrolet currently promotes itself as a green-minded corporation despite this failure. Of course, by framing itself as an environmentally ethical corporation, Chevrolet is following trends in promotion, not radically altering its approach to production and, ultimately, to what is deemed business as such. Following advertising trends is nothing novel and is arguably a fundamental aspect of the promotion industry. Such trends often involve suggestions that in the purchasing of a certain product, one's identity becomes represented and thus constructed through that commodity. Certainly this point is not under-

theorized as it is a crucial component of Wernick's theory of promotional culture as well as Bauman's theories of consumerist society and liquid modernity. While these theories point towards the domineering quality of capitalist consumption, they do not fully examine the socio-political ramifications of this domination.

Smug Alert: Toyota, Yuppie Environmentalism, and Advertising without Advertising

Toyota, like Chevrolet, has played an interesting role with regard to automobile development and environmental concern. A Japanese vehicle corporation, Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) was the first Japanese automobile manufacturer to export and market automobiles to the United States (Berger 421).¹⁶ Significantly, it is also the first company to release a commercial, mass-produced hybrid vehicle, which utilizes electricity along with traditional gasoline to power its engines (Berger 110); the vehicle, named Prius, continues to be a standard reference point for other car corporations that have entered the hybrid market (Berger 110). The Toyota Prius was first released in Japan in 1997 and subsequently in North America and Europe in 2000 ("Green Car Congress"). The release of the Prius essentially created the promotional category of hybrid vehicles, ushered in the "environmentalist" approach to personal automobiles, and established Toyota's Prius as popularly synonymous with environmentally conscious drivers and, in turn, consumers.

Like Ford and Chevrolet, Toyota frames its ethical commitment to the environment in comparative terms that lay out an essence of progress. Indeed, Toyota states that their business philosophy's aims range "from reducing the use of resources and energy in our manufacturing processes to making sure we give something back to the *people* of the Earth" ("Our Commitment," emphasis added). Contained within this declaration by Toyota is a largely anthropogenic bias, which suggests that Toyota's commitment is not one to the

¹⁶ Toyota even opened a manufacturing plant in Kentucky (Berger 186).

broader environment, as they claim, but simply to people themselves. Further illustrating its anthropocentrism, Toyota states: “At the heart of that vision lies the Toyota Earth Charter, combining ‘Kaizen,’ our philosophy of continuous improvement, with responsible environmental stewardship” (“Vision”). Here, Toyota directly implements language utilized in environmentalist discourse: stewardship, an ideological perception that suggests certain portions of the “natural” environment, such as endangered plant species or animals, need human intervention for their survival and prosperity. However, within the environmentalist movement, stewardship is not widely accepted and is often debated; rather than being widely adopted, stewardship is seen as a tenet of conservationism, not necessarily of environmentalism proper. As Mick Smith puts it: “Stewardship remains a fundamentally theocratic and *paternalistic* model wherein responsibilities for nature are actually inseparable from subservience to God and potentially, depending on how directly or indirectly the relation to God is theologically envisaged, to God’s (self-proclaimed) representatives on earth” (14, emphasis added).¹⁷ Following Smith, the logic of stewardship, which many of the campaigns examined throughout this thesis *hinge* on, relies on implied hierarchies, which suggests that the flourishing of the natural environment somehow requires human intervention and overseeing.¹⁸

¹⁷ The use of Mick Smith’s perspectives is not to be interpreted as needlessly or unjustifiably antagonistic towards religion or religious attitudes, but rather to highlight the implied hierarchies in the concept of environmental stewardship, which, as Smith points out, has its bases in theocratic perceptions of the relationship between humanity and the non-human world.

¹⁸ It is important to note that, however, the definition of stewardship is not uniformly agreed upon and not all cultures use the term in a similar manner. The “stewardship” of my critique is Western, whereas First Nations and other Indigenous groups view stewardship as a more symbiotic relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. In *Indigenous Peoples and the Collaborative Stewardship of Nature*, Ross et al. point out that the Indigenous Stewardship Model, a model they formulate as an “alternative example of co-management” which “has the potential to transcend some of the usual barriers to equal partnerships in natural resource management” (9). As Ross et al. point out, “Native peoples approached the natural world with an attitude of reverence and stewardship rather than dominion” (240). In this context, stewardship is understood as a more symbiotic relationship rather than a strictly hierarchical one.

Compared to Ford and Chevrolet, Toyota relies much more heavily on natural imagery particularly in its advertisements for its hybrid model, the Toyota Prius. In one particular Prius advertisement, the Prius is shown driving through monotonously coloured, computer animated environments and as it passes through each frame, the monotonous colours transform into lush, green, and scenic environments (“Harmony”). The voice-over narration of the advertisement even suggests that this particular model of the Prius is “harmony between man, nature, and machine” (“Harmony”). Here, Toyota suggests, both visually and narratively, that driving the vehicle is not only *less* environmentally damaging than traditional gas-powered vehicles, but will transform the natural world from its current smog-ridden state into a (re)constructed, ecologically prelapsarian form. While this supposed “harmony” between the environment and vehicles is consistent with the level of scientism seen in advertisements from Ford and Chevrolet—the claims that reconceptualised technology is the saviour of the natural environment, despite technology’s arguably crucial role in accelerating its degradation—Toyota, here, avoids overly-technological discourse while focusing instead on creating rich visuals with a straightforward voice-over. The message is, however, quite the same; consuming the “right” commodity will not only save the natural environment, it will reconstruct it in a manner that claims to satisfy a nostalgic desire for a natural environment which has never existed. Indeed, discussing nostalgia in the context of postmodernism and Lawrence Kasdan’s film *Body Heat*, Jameson reminds us of the “insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode ... in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (20); Toyota’s prelapsarian “nature” is nothing more than a constructed commercial fantasy.

On Toyota's *YouTube* channel, there are several videos that show the process of the construction of a billboard-inspired advertising campaign that Toyota created on the sides of a Californian freeway from Los Angeles to San Francisco in 2010; landscapers planted a large garden of flowers that creates a silhouette of a sun behind a Prius-shaped vehicle. It is significant that all nine of the floral advertisements were "approved by Caltrans due to federal regulations requiring floralscapes to not be commercial in nature" ("Harmony Floralscape"). The commercial quality of such advertising is obscured so exponentially and becomes so seemingly unrecognizable that Toyota's advertisement—it is tautological to identify it as anything but—is able to spill over into a venue which prohibits displays that are identifiably commercial. This is another case of an "advertisement without advertising" made possible only through the discourse of "ethical," postmodern capitalism as well as, ultimately, post-environmentalism. Indeed, the marketing manager for Toyota frankly states in a making-of video that "you really have to look at it for a while to understand that this is an advertisement for a Toyota" ("Harmony Floralscape"). One *YouTube* user, RoiGoro, even commented on the uploaded making-of video that "this [campaign] is an awesome [sic] improvement in eco-advertising" ("Harmony Floralscape"). Such an "eco-billboard" functions as a literal manifestation of post-environmentalism: Toyota enacts a rigid control over the natural world in an effort to promote its commodity while simultaneously touting its reverence for the natural world; this control, however, is symbolic of the restraint such consumerist mindsets seek to enact over nature—to be able to manipulate nature at one's whim. By carefully manicuring specific flora, Toyota expresses an ability that can be likened to early developments in greenhouses and other agricultural technologies, which can be viewed as a demonstration of humanity's *dominance* over nature, not its harmony with it. A

short-circuit between Toyota's supposed "message" and the components of that message emerges: there is a problematic disjunction here between the signifier (the carefully manicured plants that create an "abstract" image) and the signified (harmony between technology, humanity, and the natural world) that ultimately dismantles the ideological foundations of the entire project. Moreover, within the making-of video uploaded by Toyota USA, there are tell-tale markers of eco-capitalist rhetoric, such as frequent use of "sustainable" without providing a definition. They implement strategic appeals to locavores—a niche group of people who believe that consuming products made locally will reduce carbon emissions and the like—through touting their local business partnerships in a self-congratulatory manner, hybridizing words with a prefix of "eco," and so on ("Harmony Floralscape"). In several ways, Toyota's advertisement enacts Baudrillard's conception of the hyperreal: the advertisement is no longer identifiable as an advertisement-proper through its collapse of the distinction between billboard and city-funded floral scape; it is so far removed from an immediately apparent promotional endeavour that it was allowed to be placed on San Francisco freeways. However, crucially, it is through this hyperreal dynamic that Toyota secures its promotional benefit; it utilizes the very fact that it is "advertising without advertisement" to promote its product *even moreso*.

In terms of its culturally symbolic status, the Prius occupies a position that again speaks to the role of automobiles as "markers of identity within an anonymously circulating public" (70). The popular satirical television programme *South Park* centred an entire episode on the Prius and its symbolic signification. Entitled "Smug Alert!," the episode follows the transformation of one of the main characters' father after purchasing a "Toyonda Pious" from a relatively mild-mannered patriarch into an arrogant, smug individual who

literally enjoys the smell of his own flatulence. Ultimately, Kyle's family, at the behest of his father, moves to San Francisco, where other "smug" hybrid owners reside; both San Francisco and South Park (after another main character, Stan, convinces everyone in the town to purchase hybrids) become so concentrated with "smug," that it causes a possible global catastrophe ("Smug Alert!"). This episode is significant for two reasons. While humour, especially in the case of *South Park*, often plays an important socio-political role—highlighting deep-rooted cultural prejudices in order to address them frankly, shifting perspectives in order to see contemporary issues in a new light, and so on¹⁹—the treatment of the environmental crises here is arguably problematic as it undermines the gravity of the situation. However, and more relevant to discussions of automobiles, the episode addresses pervasive attitudes surrounding the perception of not only those who purchase "eco-friendly" commodities, but those who utilize such a purchase as symbolic leverage in asserting some sort of ethico-moral superiority; *South Park* ultimately highlights such a superiority by exposing a shift in behaviour of South Park's residents from "average" Americans to yuppies. This transformation not only commodifies purportedly ethical behaviour, but creates a hierarchical matrix wherein those who do not consume (paradoxically) in an "eco-friendly" manner for whatever reason (including, most prominently and problematically, socio-economic class, as "eco-products" are often markedly more *expensive* than their mass-produced counterparts) are somehow morally and/or ethically deficient.²⁰ This stratification

¹⁹ See, for example, *South Park*'s episode which addresses issues of language and racism, "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson," and contemporary perspectives on bullying, entitled "Butterballs."

²⁰ Discussing the notion of "citizen-consumer" hybrids and ethical consumption with regard to Whole Foods Market, Josée Johnston states that "[f]rom a critical perspective, ethical consumer strategies seem more like niche marketing opportunities allowing corporations to target privileged, conscientious consumers, than a substantive program for health, sustainability, and social justice at a global scale" (240). Moreover, she points out that "While state programs to provide marginalized populations with healthy, nutritious food are grossly under-developed, market options for channelling healthy organic foods to middle and upper-middle income populations are increasingly well-established" (256). What Johnston highlights here is that ethical commodities

works against fundamental aspects of environmentalism which seek radical paradigm shifts that *everyone* can take part in, not only those who can afford the price tag; however, many advertisements for the Prius construct this dynamic by suggesting that those who drive one are extraordinary in some ethico-moral sense. Rather than being citizens, we are either environmentally conscious *consumers* or ignorant *consumers*, with Prius owners falling into the former category.

Particularly with the advertisements for (and the parodies of) the Prius, the vehicle is framed as a form of *cultural* capital in a Bourdieuan sense with a distinctly *ethical* quality: a socio-ethical, cultural capital. A Prius, then, is not only environmentally friendly, according to Toyota, but crucially, through ownership of one, it *displays* the environmentality of its owner. There is, then, virtually no difference between the promotion of a certain model of vehicle being touted as an extension of or a public, cultural symbol of, for example, hyper-masculinity and environmentality; it is within this dynamic of promotion wherein the mark of post-environmentalism through superficial interactions with legitimate politics resides.

Indeed, this is a problematic consistency within post-environmentalism: it frames environmentally ethical behaviour as only accessible to a certain demographic; a large truck for an individual who identifies (or seeks to be identified) as hyper-masculine and a mid-size hybrid for one who identifies as environmentally aware. This argument is not to suggest that identity politics are not legitimate politics as such, but rather, that to frame environmentalism as simply a category of identity, or “personality,” is reductive and problematic. A UK advertisement for Toyota’s Prius constructs its demographic through a narrator who asks the

often perpetuate class stratification and are only available to a niche group. In the case of Whole Foods, she also notes that “[t]he unstated assumption [within their ethical discourse] is that people who cannot afford to make these quality consumption choices are people who care less about these values – sophistication, education, travel, good food, children’s health – and are, therefore, of lower status in the realm of food and social reproduction” (258).

audience “do you hope for a better world, dream of bluer skies, wish for a brighter today and a cleaner tomorrow?” (“Toyota Prius Ad”). While *South Park*’s parodies may offensively homogenize Prius drivers, the programme’s treatment is especially apt when considering the ways in which Toyota frames its demographic and attempts to pander to them through the suggestion that driving a Toyota Prius will contribute to a more sustainable future of sorts.

Toyota, unlike Ford and Chevrolet, has been historically linked to personal automobiles and environmental consciousness; in terms of its larger symbolic branding, Toyota is then *expected* to centre its promotional efforts on environmentality. As one of the first manufacturers to produce a commercially viable hybrid vehicle, Toyota is a forerunner in post-environmentalist automobile promotion as its socio-ethical capital most explicitly constitutes much of its promotional efforts. Moreover, while, for example, Chevrolet’s attempts to “advertise without advertising” are explicit through their appropriation of public service announcements, Toyota pushes this logic further with its “Floralscapes” which are reminiscent of Clorox’s “Reverse Graffiti” and almost hyperbolically hyperreal, with the only signification of its advertising intentions being a silhouette of a Toyota vehicle. What these attempts to “advertise without advertising” highlight are the manners in which post-environmentalism reverberates through larger promotional spheres, not restricted by commodity or commodity-type.

Conclusion:

The construction and dissemination of post-environmentalism in the promotional spheres of the automobile industry is not strictly limited to Ford, Chevrolet, or Toyota; that is one of the fundamental aspects of post-environmentalism—it is a phenomenon dispersed widely throughout contemporary capitalism and consumer culture. In terms of vehicles,

almost all major manufacturers have their own version of a hybrid vehicle, and not simply because such models are considered the “future” of automobiles, as it is well documented that the first electric vehicles developed were destroyed as a result political and economic pressures.²¹ This is where one crucial tension between the belief that technology alone will save the environment and the undeniable socio-political reality which suggests the impossibility of such thinking emerges: the base motivation for the reconciliation of environmentalism and capitalism is a desire for profit. As discussed in the Introduction, a major critical foundation on which this thesis rests is the inability to reconcile profit-driven capitalism with sustainability-driven environmentalism, a notion argued quite successfully by theorists such as Graham Purchase in *Anarchism and Ecology* and John Bellamy Foster in *Ecology Against Capitalism*. While this is not to suggest that (seemingly growing) environmental concern is simply a fad of sorts, it does point towards the tensions involved in its supposedly seamless integration into contemporary socio-economic systems that are by default unsustainable.

This present critique of Ford’s, Chevrolet’s, and Toyota’s usage and obfuscation of contemporary environmentalism is not another addition to the plethora of reactionary anti-car discourses; despite the validity of some anti-car discourses, the focus here is on the paradoxical construction of cars as the possible saviour of the environment. Ultimately, and arguably unsurprisingly, the advertisements overlook the fact that much environmentalist discourse seeks to challenge contemporary patterns of consumption, *particularly* with regard to the prevalence of personal automobile use. Instead of building from these criticisms and altering practices, these corporations suggest that the solution(s) lie in purchasing newer, fuel efficient vehicles; the solution(s) lie in *more consumption*. While these companies do not

²¹ These economic and political pressures are illustrated in the documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?*

necessarily suggest that they are environmentalist at their basic levels, they do explicitly attempt to construct a discourse which suggests that consuming their products ensures that *less* environmental damage will occur. This is precisely the type of justification necessary to attract purportedly conscientious consumers; however, it leaves the larger, arguably more damaging hegemonic socio-ideological structures unscathed. These ideological structures that perpetuate and constitute consumption, such as Fordism and individualism, are promoted through capitalism as an ideology and socio-economic system.

Can personal automobiles *ever* be “environmentally friendly”? Is the very idea of a sustainable automobile one that inherently works against the demands of environmentalism? These questions cannot be answered with statistics or any other quantifiable or supposedly objective analysis; to do so would be to devalue, *qua* abstraction, the dynamic socio-cultural qualities and assumptions that are contained within the questions themselves. Because personal automobiles, powered either through internal combustion or electricity, rely on a complex network of development and a number of industries that may or may not be implementing sustainable practices, the question is a deceptively complicated one. This complex network involved in necessary developments associated with the construction of automobiles (such as highways, roads, parking lots, and so on) is discussed at length by Yves Engler and Bianca Mugenyi in *Stop Signs*, a book that follows the two authors, in a research-supplemented auto-ethnography, throughout the United States with the goal of never travelling in a personal automobile. Among other resource heavy necessities, they require large spaces for storage (53-63), which can—and do—take up large amounts of city-owned space, and vast networks of highways and freeways. In other words, while a drastic shift from traditional, fossil-fuelled vehicles may be on the horizon, there is an even larger

epistemological and ideological shift required to alter how the personal automobile is perceived and utilized. The ideologies of capitalism and individualism and the development of technologies like the personal automobile are pervasively linked. This is the argument threaded throughout Engler and Mugenyi's *Stop Signs*—that capitalism and automobiles have a symbolic, socio-political, and socio-economic link. They state figuratively in their “Preface” that “[m]odern capitalism and cars go together like Minneapolis and St. Paul, like rubber and the road. One is very hard to imagine without the other” (7). These inseparable socio-economic and socio-cultural concepts, which are at their base-level antagonistic towards fundamental tenets of environmentalism, constitute and signify each other. Thus, the automobile which is promoted as environmentally friendly is ideologically enmeshed in complex systems that are fundamentally opposed to the very sustainability supposedly being promoted.

What has occurred—and is in the process of occurring—as a result of the emergence of “environmentally friendly” personal vehicles (whether powered by hybrid fuel-cells, electrical batteries, or simply by internal combustion that is more efficient than its predecessors or competition) is the automobile industry's marked entrance into the phenomenon of post-environmentalism. Although personal vehicles seem to be *de facto* antithetical to sustainability for a number of reasons (fuel consumption being the primary one), through the appropriation of the discourse of varied public service announcements and environmentalist rhetoric, corporations like Ford, Chevrolet, and Toyota (among others) construct an image of a concern for the natural world. As illustrated in the previous chapter (and reiterated and elaborated on in the chapter to follow), the rise of post-environmentalism is not an isolated occurrence; rather, it is reverberating throughout all of the contemporary

spheres of socio-cultural existence as well as throughout the industries *being* promoted through this approach. The extent of the paradox varies according to the industry, which influences the layout of this thesis, but the paradox is there nonetheless: as branches of environmentalism become popularized, the radical ideology of environmentalism itself is being commodified as it is used as a tool for promoting increasing levels of consumerism and, ultimately, consumption. Such consumption is a necessity for capitalism's unfettered growth as well as its survival. Of importance here are the socio-political ramifications of the appropriation of an anti-consumption discourse (environmentalism) and the subsequent obfuscation of environmentalism (the removal of its political objective); what occurs is a collapse between legitimate environmentalism and the obscured, corporate version, which results in post-environmentalism. Angela McRobbie identifies this trend in corporate mass-media with its treatment of feminism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This trend in the representation and appropriation of feminism is not explicitly linked to environmentalism, but instead to the appropriation of politics that challenge capitalism's hegemony, particularly in its most recent ideological manifestation, neoliberalism. Thus, McRobbie's elaborations on the treatment of feminism in media are equatable to the current treatment of environmentalism in promotional media. While the superficial implementation of bastardized anti-capitalist (to some degree or another) philosophy *into* the promotional spectres of contemporary capitalism may be shrugged off as simply being promotional trends, this collapse has very significant socio-political consequences for the future of radical politics. Indeed, this collapse between legitimate politics and corporate-sponsored pseudo-politics provides the foundation for illustrating and interrogating the significant effects of this collapse: as it becomes increasingly more difficult to separate legitimate ethics and politics

from their promotional counterparts, those legitimate, non-corporate (and often anti-corporate) forms will effectively no longer *exist*. Instead, what will emerge out of this Baudrillardian process are branded ethics and politics with trademarked slogans so that ethics and politics will no longer be able to be conceived outside of their corporate manifestations, something Ford has already begun with its philosophy of “EcoLogic.” The larger socio-political implications of this Baudrillardian erasure will be taken up in this thesis’ conclusion. Before then, it is important to examine the ways in which an even more ecologically stigmatized industry, the Canadian tar sands industry, is constructing its own brand of post-environmentalist, ethical capitalism in an effort to absorb and sidestep increasing criticisms from environmentalist organizations and individuals.

Chapter Three

Post-Environmental Petrocultures: *Ethical Oil*, Astroturf Campaigns, and the Post-Environmental Simulacra of Oil Politics in Canadian Media

It's a fact of life: if Americans don't fill up their cars with Canadian gasoline, their gas is going to come from another oil-producing country. Even environmentally friendly cars like the Toyota Prius still need to get their gasoline from somewhere.

EZRA LEVANT, *ETHICAL OIL*

Ezra Levant's statement here contains a number of problematic, but rather telling assumptions that provide the foundation for the emerging field of petroculture studies, which seek to question underlying socio-cultural and socio-economic forces that contribute to humanity's extreme (supposed) reliance on oil. Levant's rhetoric, here, is transparent: by framing his claim in terms of "facts," Levant is attempting to speak with irrefutable authority, which is consistent with many of the rhetorical strategies utilized by oil sands¹ proponents. Of course, whether Levant's statement is "true" or not² is not a worthwhile question to attempt to answer; rather, the point is to highlight where Levant points toward the North American reliance on oil and to query the cultural, ethical, and ecological implications of such an extreme notion of reliance. For Levant, this reliance is unproblematic and simply a "fact of life." His 2010

¹ There is, of course, a tension in the semantics of the "tar" sands, which Levant and many others refer to as oil sands. Indeed, both terms signify the same geographical space, however, both terms have significant socio-political connotations akin to the difference between "global warming" and "climate change." I opt to generally refer to the tar sands as *tar* sands largely for the reasoning that what is contained in the sands is not *actually* oil: it is bitumen and must be processed into oil. Significantly, Levant uses the terms to suit his rhetorical context *Ethical Oil*: "oil sands" when he is discussing the benefits of the sands, "tar sands" when he, for example, sarcastically counters critiques of the sands. For example, in the introductory portion to *Ethical Oil*, Levant addresses myths of the pipeline, sarcastically mimicking anti-tar sands discourse: "The tar sands are turning our collective soul as black as bitumen. It's time to do the moral thing, for change. We've got to shut down the tar sands to save Canada" (3). Levant further seems to suggest that the difference in the terms is simply a matter of chronology and accuracy: "The tar sands—or the oil sands, as they're more commonly called nowadays (tar, a product of distilled coal, just isn't accurate, no matter what certain anti-oil sands group claim; this is bitumen in Alberta's ground: a thick oil)" (3). I disagree with Levant here as "tar" does *describe* this "thick oil" accurately. Were Levant genuinely concerned with accuracy, he may consider using his own term here: "thick-oil sands."

² As seen in the previous chapter, exclusively electric vehicles *are* becoming a reality, so Levant's statement, though his sentiments are clear, is not effectively true.

bestseller *Ethical Oil* makes the case that the Canadian oil industry—largely the Alberta oil sands—is an economic godsend for Canada, its citizens, and (American) oil consumers. While superficially interacting with and disputing a number of claims that are against the development of the oil sands, Levant suggests that, in contrast to oil produced internationally—i.e. outside of Canada—Canadian oil is “ethical.” As this chapter will illustrate, oil has a socio-political life of its own; it is, in several ways, a *liquid* commodity that is currently essential in a number of industries, such as the automobile industry discussed in the previous chapter. Because of its status as an unquestioned aspect of many individuals’ lives, oil is arguably an ideology in and of itself.

Indeed, scholars such as Timothy Mitchell, Meenal Shrivastava, and Lorna Stefanik argue that it is increasingly difficult for democratic political realities to exist in a country where the major source of wealth is the export of oil. Mitchell’s guiding questions in *Carbon Democracy* ask whether or not there is a legitimate, causal link between oil and repressive political regimes. This link, whether simply coincidental or causal, constitutes a fundamental portion of Levant’s arguments in *Ethical Oil*. Levant and his followers argue that since Canada is not a repressive regime like most of its oil-producing counterparts, its oil is (more) ethical and thus should be promoted and consumed as such. Here, Levant’s rhetoric echoes the ideological structures which are at work in the promotional campaigns discussed in the previous chapters and the commodities discussed in them, particularly the commodity fetishist fantasy that not only can one enact “ethics” *through* consumption of certain commodities, but that, as a result of the “ethics” involved in the production of that particularly commodity, the commodities themselves have some essential ethic attached to them. Indeed, this faith in commodities is a hyperbolic manifestation of Marx’s observations regarding commodity fetishism: “It is nothing but the

definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between *things*” (83, emphasis added). However, instead of relations between humans existing only through the relation of things, the relations between human beings and the entire extraneous environment are reduced to a relationship of commodification. Moreover, relegating ethical behaviour to the spheres of consumption confirms the definitive characteristics of contemporary consumer culture highlighted by Bauman’s discussions of consumerist society in *Consuming Life* and Žižek’s discussions of hegemonic eco-capitalism in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, among other works and critics.

What Levant’s book and the campaigns that surround it highlight, whether intentionally or not, is that oil is not just “oil” as such. Though much scholarship focuses exclusively on either the economic implications of oil or strictly its environmental implications, for Imre Szeman, a leading Petrocultures scholar, our reliance on fossil fuels should be approached as a *socio-cultural* issue, as he notes that

Oil is not just energy. Oil is history, a source of cheap energy without which the past century and a half would have been utterly different. And oil is also ontology, the structuring ‘Real’ of our contemporary sociopolitical imaginary, and perhaps for this reason just as inaccessible as any noumenon in the flow of everyday experience from the smoggy blur of sunrise to sundown. (“Cultural Politics” 34)

Oil, then, is not an isolated commodity that one simply consumes in a utilitarian manner (as if there is *any* commodity that functions as such); rather, it has complex socio-cultural resonances and must be critically approached as such.³

³ Sidney Mintz illustrates a similar approach with regard to sugar and socio-cultural resonance in the Caribbean in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. His aim in the book, similarly to Szeman’s, is “to explain what sugar reveals about a wider world, entailing as it does a lengthy history of changing relationships among peoples, societies, and substances” (xxiv-xxv).

With these more recent approaches in mind, however, the environmental implications (and consequences) of a socio-cultural reliance on oil must neither be downplayed nor overlooked. Szeman is hyper-aware of this when he argues that “[t]he cosmic joke is on us: the last two centuries of capitalist social development has burned through energy resources which are the product of 500 million years of geological time” (“Cultural Politics” 34). Szeman continues:

Too bad that what is a temporary source of energy has been treated as permanent and fundamental to our growth economies, and that, even on the brink of a looming disaster, the end of oil tends to disappear over the horizon as the result of indifference, long-established habits, or the difficulty of imagining that things could really be as bad as all the geologists and ecologists say they are; the decrease in the cost of a gallon of fuel due to the global financial crisis has resulted in the immediate return of older patterns of driving. (“Cultural Politics” 34)

Here, Szeman highlights a short circuit between what can be labelled as, for lack of a better term, the *reality* of oil as a non-renewable resource and its treatment in dominant socio-cultural and socio-economic discourses. It is within this short-circuit that the post-environmentalist narrative of petrocultures emerges. What, then, are the implications of attempting to create and perpetuate a discourse of ethics surrounding the production and consumption of oil? While there are no straightforward answers to such a loaded question, the results of these attempts to promote Canadian tar sands oil as ethical and somehow sustainable have the same effects as other post-environmentalist discourses—they ultimately undermine environmentalist politics and ethics by isolating environmentalist discourse (like that of “sustainability”) in the spheres of capitalism and consumerism.

The construction of ethical oil by Levant and his subsequent torch-carriers, such as Kathryn Marshall, is consistent with previous analyses of the discourse which has been constructed through and has emerged from the broader intersections between capitalism and, largely environmental, ethics. There is both an implicit and explicit tension between economic forces and ethical, environmentalist forces in the oil industry, as much of the contemporary literature correlates.⁴ The oil industry, *especially* the Canadian oil industry, is no exception in its perpetuation and constitution of the phenomenon of post-environmentalism; however, the industry is unique in relation to the industries examined in Chapters One and Two with regard to environmentalist movements. Indeed, the oil industry is largely viewed as an *inherently* anti-environmental one, even from the perspectives of more liberal environmentalists and environmentalist organizations, such as Greenpeace. Furthermore, much of the oil industry and its supporters actively work against environmentalist organizations. Through books such as Levant's *Ethical Oil*, aggressive media campaigns from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and the pseudo-grassroots politics of the *Ethical Oil* campaign, what can be labelled as the Canadian oil industry appropriates the discourses of its challengers and simultaneously undermines oppositional groups, such as large numbers of First Nations and organizations such as the Sierra Club.

This chapter examines the ways in which Levant's popular and arguably controversial *Ethical Oil*, promotional material from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) with a focus on reclamation projects, and the largely social media-based *Ethical Oil* campaign fit within the paradigm of post-environmentalism, as well as the socio-political implications of the efforts involved in the perpetuation of post-environmentalism within the

⁴ See, for example, Andrew Nikiforuk's *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* and Meenal Shrivastava and Lorna Stefanick's "Do Oil and Democracy Only Clash in the Global South?" as well as Imre Szeman's recent work on petrocultures. To an extent, Levant's book attests to these tensions also by attempting to reconcile them.

context of oil politics. What separates the Canadian oil industry from the previously examined categories of corporations and their commodities is that, as mentioned above, the oil industry is generally acknowledged as an inherently environmentally damaging industry. While there are clear links between the oil industry and automobiles (physically as well as ideologically), creating a case for the environmental sustainability of oil extraction (and its transportation) seems an exercise in futility. However, Levant attests that tar sands oil is “more environmentally clean, more peaceful, more democratic, and more fair” than oil from other sources, which he argues is “the true test of moral oil” (*Ethical Oil* 7). There is a clear appropriation of socio-political and environmental discourses that work contra Canadian oil sands, which are utilized to promote the industry while undermining its opponents, thus constructing a post-environmentalist discourse with far-reaching socio-political implications. These discourses contain the most aggressively Baudrillardian components as each mode of discourse (from Levant’s book to CAPP’s website) contains efforts to frame the processes involved in the oil industry as ecologically sound and sustainable. For the sake of coherence, each will be read as a “text,” in a poststructuralist sense, that contributes to the post-environmentalist undermining of largely environmental ethics and politics by perpetuating a socio-cultural “reality” where politics *can* only be conceived within a corporate context. The aim here is to create a socio-political reality where there are only consumers and corporate entities—a world Bauman argues already exists. By perpetuating a pervasive discourse that seeks only to conceive of politics and ethics within a corporate context, the foundation for creating a socio-political reality wherein extra-corporate politics and ethics become not simply rare, but impossible to conceive of, is implemented. With the growing number of tar sands industry developments such as the proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline, which threatens the British Columbian coastline, the need for questioning and

interrogating the ramifications of post-environmentalist petropolitics—the “greening” of fossil fuels—has arguably never been as urgent as it is now.

Reductio Ad Bitumen: Environmentalism, Commodity Fetishism, and Ezra Levant’s *Ethical Oil*

Levant’s 2010 book *Ethical Oil* functions simultaneously as a justification for the development of the tar sands—including the corporations involved in such development—as well as an attack against those who oppose the developments and corporations, whether individuals or groups and organizations. Levant is particularly keen on defending the corporations involved in tar sands development as well as the processes involved in transforming bitumen into crude oil, a process that has come under criticism by environmental groups and individuals such as Andrew Nikiforuk and Timothy Mitchell. What is of importance with Levant’s *Ethical Oil* is not only its internal arguments, which will be discussed shortly, but also the “grassroots” campaign it sparked; indeed, the process of transforming a political book into a movement is largely associated with the political left. Recent examples include Michael Albert’s book *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, which recently inspired the creation of the International Organization for a Participatory Society (IOPS). With the clearly *corporate* aims of Levant and the Ethical Oil campaign’s arguments in mind, the appropriation of left-wing, including environmentalist, discourse is clear. To understand the arguments at the heart of the Ethical Oil campaign, however, it is necessary to interrogate the logic behind Levant’s construction of ethical discourse within the realm of tar sands politics.

Interestingly, Levant frames the arguments in his book around questions of ethics, ultimately correlating the democratic, or anti-democratic, authoritarian politics of a given nation with the oil that it produces, and vice versa, suggesting that commodities produced in a given

nation are somehow infused with the political characteristics of that nation.⁵ Here, Levant unreflexively, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuates the mechanisms of what Bauman labels as consumerist ideology by suggesting that the link between ethics and consumption is inherent. By establishing this link *de facto*, Levant is able then to compare the “ethics” of oil-producing countries by examining the qualities of their respective governments (i.e. whether they are authoritarian, democratic, etc.). Levant’s logic is thus: by consuming oil that is produced in what Levant deems an undemocratically governed country, one is directly supporting that regime. Ultimately, Levant concludes that Canada is among the few democracies that produce and sell oil, particularly to the United States: “Out of the top ten countries with the largest reserves, Canada is the only liberal democracy, other than the fledgling democracy of Iraq” (13). Moreover, Levant challenges those who criticize the tar sands, stating that “for ethical oil consumers, unless there’s a better alternative, demonizing Canadian oil isn’t just useless—it can be counterproductive, by driving consumers into the hands of oil producers who are worse by every ethical measure” (14). What Levant’s approach misses, whether intentionally or not, is the fundamental *reason* that, for example, environmentalist groups “demonize” Canadian oil, which largely stem from a challenge to reliance on fossil fuels and unsustainable developments that they see as environmentally destructive, rather than simply a foreign-funded conspiracy wherein international environmentalist organizations are regarded as pundits for Saudi Arabian oil companies, as Levant suggests consistently throughout his book. After comparing Canada’s government with that of other oil-producing nations, which happen largely to be non-democratic,

⁵ This is an explicit example of Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism, which Marx states is inherent in commodities: “So it is in the world of commodities with the product of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (165).

Levant rhetorically asks the reader: “which source of oil do you prefer” (23)? One can imagine a hypothetical response from one of those environmentalists that Levant is criticizing—none.

Levant goes as far as to claim—with a possible note of facetiousness—that the work done by Canadian oil sands corporations is *benevolent*, which is precisely where his work enters the realm of post-environmentalism. This is an example of post-environmentalist logic *par excellence* come full-circle. Levant begins the chapter entitled “The Most Scrutinized Industry on Earth” by stating that “[o]nly in Alberta’s oil sands do companies not only *volunteer* to dig up *naturally occurring* petroleum that’s bubbling out of the soaked ground and oozing into the rivers, they spend billions of dollars for the privilege of doing it. You might call it the largest cleanup of an oil spill in the history of the world” (107, emphasis added). Here, Levant constructs oil companies as selfless volunteers that are interested in cleaning up tar; moreover, he suggests that they are paying for it, implying, to a noticeable degree, that oil companies do not profit from their tar sands developments. This line of thought is dangerous as it quite literally attempts to blur the distinction between unpaid *volunteers* and profit-driven, natural resource extraction companies while simultaneously, and almost jovially, undermining the environmental reality of oil spills. Problematically, Levant also explicitly naturalizes the process of creating oil from bitumen, ultimately overshadowing the fact that it is an incredibly resource-heavy process that has only recently been able to be completed without costing more than the resulting oil would provide profit for the companies (Nikiforuk 13-17). Indeed, in a lecture at Duke University, entitled “The Oil Sands: Economic Saviour or Environmental Disaster,” Dr. David Schindler discussed the misrepresentation of “recycling water” in tar sands developments, which is a point stressed in the *Ethical Oil* campaign to attest to the tar sands’ environmentally friendly behaviour. Speaking of tar sands developers, Schindler states that “in the 40 some years that

they've been operating there's not a single one of these [tailings ponds] that has come anywhere near standards that they can discharge" ("The Oil Sands"). The denial of this reality marks another instance where Levant's rhetoric falls into the realm of misrepresentation.

Marginalizing environmentalist groups and critics of the tar sands, Levant puts forth a reductive argument that attempts to pit environmentalists against the "everyday" Canadian oil worker. Levant explicitly states that "if anti-oil sands groups ... had their way, the eighty thousand or so people who work in Fort McMurray, and thousands more across the country, would be out of work" (72). On the one hand, Levant's argument is an attempt to suggest that he is in some sort of solidarity with the tar sands workers, and on the other it implicitly suggests, *de facto*, that the interests of environmentalists are in direct conflict with the interests of workers. This is not a novel argument. It is often used by the political right and can be seen in Joe Oliver's open letter, which is discussed below. The reality of the relationship between tar sands opposition and those who are employed in tar sands development is, however, more complex, and begins with an interrogation of where the workers' sympathies lie. In *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, Nikiforuk approaches actual workers to discuss their perspectives on the realities of living in Fort McMurray, the tar sands boomtown, something that, crucially, Levant does not do. What Nikiforuk highlights is that while workers are employed by the tar sands, their own socio-political ethics do not necessarily coalesce with the work, or the working environment, in which they are involved. Furthermore, to suggest that a fundamental goal of environmentalists and tar sands opponents is to simply put individuals out of work is grossly reductive almost to the point of absurdity—an argumentative strategy that is riddled throughout *Ethical Oil*. Levant does reveal his true colours by arguing that "[e]ven the working poor in Fort McMurray are rich compared to the rest of the world" (230); such faulty logic exposes a very

clear lack of empathy for those who struggle to live in a boomtown that has notably high living costs (Nikiforuk 46).

Levant applauds the status of human rights in Canada. Significantly, he attempts to pander to marginalized groups of peoples with regard to human rights—First Nations, women, the LGBTQ community, among others. However, his arguments are, ultimately, superficial as they lack any sophisticated understanding of the socio-historical and contemporary socio-political relationships between these groups and the Canadian government. Indeed, Levant’s benchmark for measuring the standards of human rights in Canada—and in turn the oil Canada produces—frames such standards. Rather than acknowledging the complexity and nuances of human rights struggles in Canada, Levant instead invokes the human rights progresses made in Canada, which are the result of the political struggles, to suggest that Canadian commodities contain the “ethics” of Canadian democracy. As a result, Levant *undermines* such progress by superficially acknowledging it and simply using it as a rhetorical device to justify his cause: a strategy that is structurally identical to post-environmentalism. Considering Levant’s previous book *Shakedown: How Our Government is Undermining Democracy in the Name of Human Rights*, which, through his modes of argumentation, perpetuates transphobia and other forms of discrimination,⁶ such rhetorical obfuscation of the realities of historical and contemporary human rights struggles is unsurprising. Levant, here, enacts cognitive dissonance as he sees the functions and effects of human rights issues in Canada as simultaneously to be applauded when the context supports his arguments and criticized when they do not.

⁶ See Levant’s discussion of a 1995 human rights case involving a transsexual woman, Kimberly Nixon, and Vancouver Rape Relief where Levant explicitly refers to Nixon as male through the use of the second person pronoun “he” and labels her a “troubled man,” despite her having fully transitioned, physically as well as legally (*Shakedown* 50-3).

Within Levant's *Ethical Oil* there are a number of assumptions regarding nationalism, democracy, and economics, to name a few. And within those assumptions are problematic comparative arguments⁷ that undermine his line of inquiry. Levant concludes his arguments through a final string of rhetorical questions: "if we have to produce oil, and we have to buy oil—and we absolutely must do both—whose oil should we do our best to support? Who can we trust to do it the most morally? There can be no doubt: Canada does it best" (*Ethical Oil* 233). Ultimately, Levant's logic attempts to frame Canadian tar sands as the ethical exception, reductively idealizing Canada as an exemplary democracy. Significantly, both Nikiforuk's *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* and Shrivastava and Stefanik's less polemical paper, "Do Oil and Democracy Only Clash in the Global South?," argue that the Canadian and Albertan governments are effectively undermining democracy in a possible case of Dutch Disease. Dutch Disease is defined by Shrivastava and Stefanik as "[a] resource boom [which] increases the demand for labor, which causes production to shift toward the booming sector, away from the lagging sector" and ultimately results in nations "los[ing] out on some of the productivity gains ... that are critical for economic diversification and political-social liberalism" (6). This issue is consistently described by scholars as the "resource curse" (Nikiforuk 172; Shrivastava and Stefanik 5). Shifting back to Levant's discussion of oil-regimes, it is important to emphasize that this is not a defence of oil-producing regimes and their anti-democratic practices and to recognize the implications of Levant's sustained comparisons of Canada's ethics and the ethics of other, largely authoritarian, oil-producing countries. By sustaining the comparison, he is utilizing authoritarian regimes as a sort of socio-ethical benchmark from which

⁷ Levant's comparative logic, here, is similar to the comparative logic in the promotion of post-environmentalist commodities analyzed in Chapters One and Two, where, for example, corporations claim that their packaging uses a certain percentage less plastic than "normal packaging" ("PlantBottle Basics") or their vehicle consumes a certain percentage less fuel than its competitor's equivalent.

to define Canadian “Oil” identity in an Orientalist manner. Moreover, Levant also acknowledges a sort of propaganda war involved on both sides of the debate, largely singling out Greenpeace and Andrew Nikiforuk as perpetrators, but sees his own book as *outside* that war, despite all indications of his own implications in the “war,” which is ultimately evidenced in the spawning of a pseudo-grassroots campaign whose sole purpose is to disseminate pro-tar sands perspectives. Of course, Levant’s refusal to acknowledge his work as propagandistic is unsurprising; acknowledging his own work as part of that propaganda war would undermine the ways in which Levant and the Ethical Oil campaign seek to veil the propagandistic aspects of their discourse through hyperreal discourses.

Simulacra and Reclamation: Petropolitics, Ideological Corporate Apparatuses, and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

As of 2012, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) has launched a relatively aggressive advertising campaign that includes television advertisements, an interactive website, and a smartphone app entitled “Upstream Dialogue: The Facts on Oil Sands,” which provides information regarding the oil sands to mobile users. The aim of the campaign is to provide a venue for the public to access “facts” regarding the oil sands, a clear attempt to veil the corporate and economic biases in the perpetrators of these arguments. While efforts towards corporate transparency, especially in such a socially and ecologically sensitive industry, should be promoted and arguably even standardized,⁸ CAPP’s efforts here are arguably propagandic,

⁸ Although this is a tangential debate, the notion of standardized corporate transparency (to a greater degree than currently exists) is admittedly an idealistic viewpoint, but one that does not seem all too absurd, especially when considering public controversies surrounding oil spills. For example, a recent spill in Alberta from Enbridge’s “Rainbow” pipeline was visited by Greenpeace members who note:

What we found was a body of water that was completely black on the surface with black sludge along the shoreline. There was no life in this body of water nor was there any vegetation along the shoreline. Instead, dead wood lined the shore and an awful smell permeated the area. After 15 months, this was not what I was expecting to find in an apparent ‘oil spill clean up area.’ (Laboucan-Massimo)

largely as a result of its authoritative use of “facts.” Indeed, the discourse constructed by CAPP quite forcefully invests itself, like Levant’s arguments in *Ethical Oil*, in what it labels as facts. However, such an investment in—and perpetuation of—“facts” is problematic as it suggests a type of knowledge based on scientific inquiry that is singular, authoritative, and objective. Poststructuralist schools of thought are sceptical of grand narratives and play a significant role here as they highlight the problematic hierarchies and stratifications of knowledge that “factual” discourse facilitates. Such a line of argument can be explicitly found in Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges,” wherein she suggests from a feminist and social constructionist point of view that “science—the real game in town—is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one’s manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of very objective power” (577). Indeed, CAPP *relies* on such Harawayian scepticism to be absent from popular consciousness; the frequent and monotonous use of the word “fact” attempts to construct a discourse wherein the details it presents are indisputable. These facts are aimed at dispelling objections surrounding the oil sands, particularly objections stemming from social contexts, most prominently through relations with First Nations, and environmental concerns.

Here, one can extend the logic of Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)⁹ with one crucial difference: the state’s role is masked as CAPP is technically a public advocacy group rather than an institution officially sanctioned and run by government. However, there are notable ties between the group and the Conservative Party of Canada, both in terms of overlay of supported projects as well as through individual links. While the potential for conflict of interests here is abundant, this is not the point; rather, the point is to highlight the ways in

What this signifies is that for a healthy sceptic, even government sources may not be trusted to deliver proper details regarding spills and are equally entrenched in the post-environmentalist paradigm.

⁹ In his seminal essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser defines Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as crucially differentiated from the repressive State apparatus, which includes “the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.” (1341).

which several institutions are linked on multiple levels that function to *shroud* the biases contained within those links, whether they culminate in the form of media conglomerates or lobbyist groups like CAPP. Where that logic enters is through CAPP's sheltering of itself behind the facsimile of facts; CAPP does not "fit" in the traditional Althusserian institutions of ISAs, which include:

The religious ISA (the system of different Churches), The educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'Schools'),

- the family ISA,
- the legal ISA,
- the political ISA
- the trade-union ISA,
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
- the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.). (1341)

Although CAPP may be considered part of "the communications ISA," it functions simultaneously as Ideological State Apparatus as well as Repressive State Apparatus, effectively blurring the distinction between an independent, non-governmental organization (such as the Sierra Club) and a governmental branch. While Althusser does point out that both repressive State apparatuses and ISAs have the same *function* and that "[t]here is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus" (1342), his logic in this context meshes with the logic of postmodern capitalism, which ultimately culminates in a *corporate, promotional* Ideological State Apparatus. This notion of the corporate ISA situates CAPP (and the Ethical Oil campaign) in a context that both overtly expresses its ideological functions and highlights the structural, coercive elements of those ideological functions.

One of CAPP's more explicitly promotionally geared websites, "Oil Sands Today," contains an embedded, animated banner that cycles through a number of images with superimposed text, all emphasizing commitments and positive aspects of the tar sands, which are

enforced visually—the images are all extremely bright, take place outdoors, and highlight lush qualities of nature as such (“Oil Sands Today”). Some subsidiary portions of the website include profiles of some of the organizations’ employees, along with personal write-ups discussing their role in the company as well as their aims, which ultimately function to *humanize* oil sands development. Of notable significance is a page which is dedicated to an “Environmentalism and *Greenpeace* Co-Founder,” Patrick Moore, who, in an embedded video advertisement made for CAPP, is shown walking through a reclaimed area of the tar sands in an attempt to express how positive the reclamation process is after bitumen mining.¹⁰ By stressing the title of “environmentalist” and Moore’s former involvement with *Greenpeace*, CAPP attempts to suggest that there is no conflict between environmentalist principles and the realities of the oil industry in Canada.¹¹ In the embedded video, which is structured not unlike other advertisements-*cum*-public service announcements, such as the ones from Coca-Cola and Chevrolet, he states in a rather quotidian manner that “[w]here there was once an oil sands mining operation, you now have a beautiful, bio-diverse landscape again, where you’d never know there’d been a mine there in the first place” (“Patrick Moore”). The print advertisement that functions as a companion piece to the video segment extends this line of thought, quoting Moore labelling this specific project as “the best reclamation I’ve seen” (“Patrick Moore”). This particular reclamation project’s habitat—although populated with “native” species—has animals, Bison, which were placed there as a conservatory effort by those involved in the project. What is

¹⁰ Of course, it is unsurprising that in *Ethical Oil*, Levant uses Patrick Moore to attack Greenpeace’s scientific objectivity as he quotes Moore thus: “Ultimately, a trend toward *abandoning scientific objectivity* in favour of political agendas forced me to leave Greenpeace in 1986” (qtd. in Levant 145). Such use of Moore fits into the larger discourse of “facts” and faith in “science” that is emphasized throughout *Ethical Oil* and broader post-environmentalist discourse.

¹¹ Here, one can be reminded of Bob Lutz’s statement that he is an environmentalist “within reason” (*Revenge*).

significant about such reclamation projects is that the previous ecosystems that were disrupted for development cannot simply be “recreated” by ecologists and other scientists.

In this sense, then, signifying this process as one of *reclamation* is misleading; a more apt descriptor would be *reconstruction* with a full acknowledgement that human beings cannot construct the natural world as such, but only participate in the simulacra of nature. Thus, such reclamations enact the logic of the Baudrillardian hyperreal wherein the post-tar sands ecosystems are reconstructed to be more “natural” than they previously were—more “natural” than nature. The rhetoric from CAPP and Moore himself, then, unravels itself and points towards the manufactured, almost synthetic aspect of this new ecosystem. Indeed, the one reclamation in Fort McMurray, a park owned by the oil corporation Syncrude named “Gateway Hill” further solidifies the problematics involved in these reconstructions, as regulations do not specify that the land being reclaimed must mirror the conditions previously present; the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act’s *Conservation and Reclamation Regulations* vaguely states that the land must be returned to “equivalent land capability” (2). Sam Kean, a popular science writer who in 2009 wrote an illustrative piece about the reclamation projects that were in the process of completion at the time, states that “[t]o all *appearances*, it’s a thriving ecosystem” (1052, emphasis added). However, as the Parkland Institute points out, “reclamation does not mean restoration” (Hildebrand “Reclamation”). Moreover, Hildebrand highlights the fact that the “Gateway Hill” was once “[a] complex of forests and low-lying wetlands” that “has been transformed into a dry, hilly upland with new trails for human use” (“Reclamation”). Certainly, then, the dynamics of hyperreality are in action in the reclamation projects. A spokesperson’s statement regarding the project highlights this logic: “If people aren’t looking closely, it blends into the natural landscape” (Moore qtd. in Hildebrand). Moore’s statement is

pertinent here as it not only points out the Baudrillardian qualities of reclamation, but also its uncanny effects. Sigmund Freud's seminal essay "The Uncanny" elaborates on the etymological significance of the notion of the uncanny. Discussing the German terms for canny/uncanny in a proto-deconstructionist manner, Freud states,

The German word '*unheimlich*' is obviously the opposite of '*heimlich*' [homely], '*heimisch*' [native]—the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation is not capable of inversion. (826)

Freud's concept, particularly when using the literal translations from German, homely and unhomely, points towards the ways in which the reclamation project is both "natural" and "synthetic." This is precisely where the hyperreal qualities of the reclamation projects emerge; the project collapses the distinction between a natural landscape and a manufactured one in an arguably frightening manner.

Much like the automobile campaigns that emphasize technological progress, much of the rhetoric surrounding the sustainability of tar sands development in Canada hinges on the notion that further technological development will somehow make bitumen mining and land reclamation a more feasibly sustainable and environmentally friendly process. Some, including Sam Kean, have labelled what occurs in this reclaimed site as a form of "eco-alchemy"—a term which suggests a certain level of mysticism and, as a result, scepticism as to the validity of the claims by oil producers which suggest the project's ecological soundness. Although it borders on popular science, Kean's article entitled "Eco-Alchemy in Alberta" highlights a number of pertinent issues regarding the ecological viability of the reclamation projects as well as some of

the tensions that are implicit in “reconstructing” biodiversity. Indeed, while oil companies certainly have the money to “rebuild” natural environments, ecologists recognize that it is impossible to reproduce the environmental conditions that existed before mining (1052-3). Kean dubiously points to the simulacra of these reclamations with his usage of scare quotes when discussing the regulations that oil companies must adhere to: “By Canadian law, oil companies must convert those ponds back to ‘nature’” (1053). However, Kean is also quick to point out that “[i]t’s not clear what technologies, if any, can reclaim ponds and land on the scale needed” (1053). These rebuilt ecosystems highlight some pertinent issues around the culturally constructed identity of nature itself as the reconstruction destabilizes the conventional understanding of what constitutes the natural world. In this thesis, I have argued, following arguments made by scholars such as Derrida and Morton, that nature as such is a cultural construct; thus the reclamation projects are doubly hyperreal.

In many ways, then, the result of tailings pond reclamation projects, a “rebuilt” ecosystem, is a “poster child” of sorts for post-environmentalism; in a single image, they illustrate a socio-cultural and socio-economic mindset that simultaneously and paradoxically shows “respect” for the natural world, albeit as the result of mandatory regulations, as well as complete disregard for it. One need only glance at the “before,” “during,” and “after” shots of the open pit mining process to fully see this paradoxical logic at work. Moreover, this discourse suggests that there is no short circuit in the modes of thought which suggest that an ecosystem can be destroyed as its resources are extracted. CAPP’s Mission statement reads as follows: “CAPP’s mission is to enhance the economic sustainability of the Canadian upstream petroleum industry in a safe and environmentally and socially responsible manner, through constructive engagement and communication with governments, the public and stakeholders in the

communities in which we operate” (“CAPP’s Mission”). In the larger contexts of tar sands promotional media, CAPP attempts to provide the sober, factual discourse as a means to address any hesitation the general populace may have regarding the ecological impacts of tar sands development. Spreading a similar message, but through quite wildly different measures, is the Ethical Oil campaign, which, largely through social media, seeks to extend Levant’s arguments into a participatory and interactive setting in an effort to undermine tar sands opponents, largely environmentalists and environmental organizations.

Astroturf Politics: Hyperreal Advertising, Pseudo-Activism, and the Resuscitation of Nationalism

In a 2012 debate between John Bennet, Director of Sierra Club, and Kathryn Marshall, the then public relations representative for the Ethical Oil campaign, on CBC’s “Power & Politics with Evan Solomon,” Marshall quite explicitly dodged questions and answers many with tautological platitudes. Under pressure, Marshall sounded like a broken record; her only response to questions regarding where funding comes from for the *Ethical Oil* project and website is “we are a small grassroots campaign” (“Pipeline debate”), as if repeating it enough will make it true.¹² The emptiness, as a result of Marshall’s extensive repetitions and seeming inability to elaborate on any of the arguments she made, points towards not only the illusory aspects of Ethical Oil’s politics, but also its enactment of *mimicry*. As the debate moves forward, there is a clear short circuit between the manner in which Bennet elaborates on his points and the way Marshall does. Marshall’s mimicry has significant socio-political ramifications—as Ethical Oil continues to co-opt the discourse of its adversaries, it

¹² Marshall’s talking points—particularly those regarding foreign funding—were repeated in an early 2012 debate about the Northern Gateway pipeline among herself, Terry Teegee, Vice Tribal Chief of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, and Eric Swanson, a representative of Dogwood Initiative which aired on CTV’s programme *Question Period*.

simultaneously *undermines* those it mimics. Discussing mimicry and (post-)colonialism, Homi K. Bhabha argues:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Its threat, I would add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory ‘identity effects’ in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no ‘itself.’ (90)

Bhabha’s observations on mimicry here are applicable to multiple aspects of the Ethical Oil campaign and to the larger notion of post-environmentalism; in their attempts to mimic the discourse of ethical and environmental politics through strategic appropriation of tenets of those discourses, proponents of Ethical Oil alter and undermine what constitutes ethical and environmental politics as such. This notion of promotion *qua* mimicked politics is evident in Ethical Oil’s online petition to “reduce U.S. dependence on Conflict Oil by allowing more Americans to choose Ethical Oil from Canada, its oilsands, and other liberal democracies” (“Petition”). These veiled promotional endeavours, which are framed as industry advocacy efforts, is an overt, paradoxical attempt to appropriate grassroots, activist discourse for the purposes of promoting an industry that is challenged by the very activist groups whose strategies are being appropriated. In the context of oil and ecological politics, the Ethical Oil campaign threatens to depoliticize social and environmental activisms that seek to challenge the reliance on fossil fuels and the hegemony of petrocultures.

Ultimately, this campaign hinges on the logic of Baudrillardian hyperreality as it seeks to enmesh two arguably ideologically opposing actions, consumption and activism. Indeed, framing consumption as a socio-political act involves an amalgamation of hyperreal promotional efforts. The argument behind the campaign is that countries including Canada that “produce Ethical Oil protect the rights of women, workers, indigenous peoples and other minorities including gays and lesbians” whereas “Conflict Oil regimes, by contrast, oppress their citizens and operate in secret with no accountability to voters, the press or independent judiciaries” (“About Ethical Oil”). By framing the Canadian oil industry in such a manner, the campaign functions to marginalize *environmental* concerns by constructing an “us” versus “them” nationalistic narrative.¹³ Moreover, a number of the posts on the website—up until recently all seemingly posted by a single author, Kathryn Marshall—attempt to de-legitimize well-established international environmental rights groups through a number of measures. In terms of environmental ethics, the oil industry is arguably one of the *least* ethical industries; what occurs here, then, is a Baudrillardian *simulation* of ethics that functions to collapse the distinction between ethics as a socio-political concept and capitalist consumption, thereby creating a form of hyperreal ethics wherein action (activism) toward the promotion of the rights of women, indigenous, gays, lesbians, and so on is conflated with consuming (Canadian) oil. This conflation is ultimately superficial and damaging to each group listed here; while Canada does indeed recognize each group and tolerate them when *compared* to places like Saudi Arabia, it is

¹³ Certainly, however, the environmental movement on the whole is not innocent in this respect, as early environmentalism’s focus on place and region has been noted to result in a form of nationalism. For more on this, see Rob Nixon’s essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,” where he warns of environmentalism’s insular history, which can result in “jingoistic transcendentalism” (237). Nixon provides an example of this notion in the work of Rick Bass. Nixon points out that Bass, “[i]n trying to rally Americans to a worthy preservationist cause, ... may be resorting here to what Spivak calls ‘strategic essentialism’ ... Bass aggrandizes and naturalizes the American national character in ways politically perturbing” (237).

necessary to point that the Canadian government has largely had a historically tumultuous relationship with these groups, even recently.

Ethical Oil promotes a notion that both consumption and capitalism function not only outside the realm of ideology, but as a system in which a consumer can promote ethical behaviour. Capitalism here is promoted as some sort of supra-ideological system, as a *tabula rasa* in which ethically “good” behaviour can be enacted in the form of consumption. The irony in the case of Ethical Oil, then, is that the ethical values it suggests as being promoted by Canada—and in turn the Canadian tar sands—are not widely accepted as accurate, especially in the case of indigenous Canadians who have a history of opposing oil-related developments. Indeed, this is where the hyperreal ethics emerge—*Ethical Oil* continually steps away from any sort of Baudrillardian “real” by shrouding its aims in a simulated “grassroots” movement that simultaneously simulates legitimate grassroots, non-governmental organizations. *Ethical Oil*, however, is an example of neoliberalism in practice *par excellence* as it attempts to affirm Fukuyama’s arguments of capitalism’s ability (within a liberal democracy) to “house the homeless, guarantee opportunity for minorities and women, improve competitiveness, and create new jobs” (46) as he essentially argues that there is no system outside of capitalism that can be imagined. Again, as in the Ethical Oil campaign, there is a viewpoint that capitalism functions extra-ideologically and that anything is possible within it, despite the fact that campaigns such as Ethical Oil are simulating ethics in an attempt to promote support of the oil industry in Canada as well as its consumption with absolutely no regard for the ecological implications of oil extraction. From a Baudrillardian perspective, this suggests that capitalism has truly become hyperreal as it enters a sphere in which it is no longer associated with ideology. This is precisely the collapse that Baudrillard speaks of—there being “only signs, without referents, empty,

senseless, absurd and elliptical” (*Seductions* 74); however, while contemporary postmodern capitalism, which seeks to “mobilize” consumers while simultaneously confining them within the mechanisms of capitalism, is in this sense “empty,” it does have *real* socio-political ramifications.

The binaristic, either/or logic constructed by Ethical Oil perpetuates a paradigm wherein an individual is either on one side, *for* Canadian oil, or the other, *against* Canadian oil. The result of this reductive logic allows those in the former camp to claim the domain of patriotism while simultaneously vilifying the latter in terms of anti-patriotism without any regard for the *reasons* why they may be against Canadian oil or even fossil fuels in general. Indeed, within this paradigm is an opportunity for the Ethical Oil campaign to label environmentalist organizations as not only anti-patriotic, but as *supportive* of the regimes outside of Canada where oil is produced. Moreover, environmentalist organizations are then framed as somehow against the “everyday” Canadian. Marshall points to this when she states in the debate discussed above that “this is becoming a battle against reasonable, every day, hardworking Canadians and foreign special interests and their deep pockets and their puppet groups who are trying to hijack and gum-up a *Canadian* process” (“Pipeline debate,” emphasis added). This type of reductionism overlooks the aims of many environmentalist organizations whose members do not view the world in terms of nationalistic territorialism; rather, environmentalist organizations seek to preserve ecosystems while challenging those who threaten them. Moreover, there is cognitive dissonance at work, as Evan Solomon points out in the same debate, which intentionally overlooks the fact that Canadian oil-related politics have foreign parties involved, albeit at less disclosed levels. It is important to note that the Ethical Oil campaign has yet to disclose the source of its funding, in the form of “donations.” The manner in which donations are disclosed

attests to such suspicions as the only accounting of donations on the website is that the *median* donation is \$38 (“About Ethical Oil”). It is important to note that the calculation is a median, wherein the literal middle value is the median; for example, if the campaign was given three donations of \$1 million, \$30, and \$1 respectively, the median would be \$30. Moreover, the address listed on the website for Ethical Oil’s donation mailbox is the same as one previously used by a Conservative Member of Parliament, Tony Clement (Uechi).

Significantly, the rhetorical focus on foreign funding and the resuscitation of explicit, othering nationalism effectively silences environmentalist groups in Canada that happen to receive funding from outside of Canada, regardless of, as Bennet of the Sierra Club and others point out, *how* that money is used. This vilification of environmentalists *through* the perpetuation of a xenophobic “us versus them” mentality is not limited to the Ethical Oil campaign, but is also echoed in branches of the Canadian government. In a 2012 open letter that addresses environmental activist behaviour in Canada, Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver stated that “[u]nfortunately, there are environmental and other radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our trade” (“The Media Room”). He further argues that

These groups [of environmental “radicals”] threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda. They seek to exploit any loophole they can find, stacking public hearings with bodies to ensure that delays kill good projects. They use funding from foreign special interest groups to undermine Canada’s national economic interest. (“The Media Room”)

Here, the sentiments of the Minister of Natural Resources regarding those who oppose tar sands developments not only echo those of Levant and the broader *Ethical Oil* campaign, particularly Marshall’s talking points from the debate discussed above, they are repeated almost *verbatim*.

Ultimately, the Ethical Oil campaign is established on foundations of hyperreal politics which seek to appropriate the discourse and political strategy of groups that are in opposition to tar sands developments. By doing so, it *also* seeks to undermine those groups and individuals that challenge tar sands developments. Tellingly, like many of Levant's arguments, much of the logic that the campaign hinges on is fallacious and reductive, largely relying on either/or strategies. It simulates being actively informed while promoting a fundamentally corporate agenda, effectively collapsing the distinction between grassroots politics and corporate advocacy. In a sense, although speculating on its sources of funding proves to be futile, Ethical Oil, much like Clorox's "Reverse Graffiti" and Toyota's "Floralscapes," attempts to shroud and veil its promotional motivations as it functions as a form of "advertising without advertising." Indeed, if funding *did* come from oil corporations, which is *likely*, but at this point, unprovable, Ethical Oil would be what is termed an astroturf campaign, which "has come to refer to the practice where an organisation (political, corporate or otherwise) uses the internet and social media to boost its own image by simulating grassroots support" (Kolivos and Kuperman 38). Moreover, Ethical Oil quite explicitly illustrates the way in which hegemony-challenging politics (in this case, environmentalism) can be absorbed and co-opted in a paradoxical manner, which has far-reaching socio-political ramifications.

Conclusion:

In his analysis of the representation of nature and its intersection with (neo-)colonial practices through a focus on British Columbia's Inland Temperate Rainforests and the politics of their mediatization, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)colonial British Columbia," Bruce Braun explores a similar dynamic found in the Ethical Oil campaign as well as CAPP's website in promotional material for British Columbian forestry developments. Braun

highlights the significance of semantics in the “media wars” between activists against certain forestry developments and the corporations and government sectors that support it, ultimately pointing towards the significance of *representation* in the context of promoting natural resource developments. Through an analysis of promotional material for MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., a former prominent Canadian forestry corporation, Braun states that “[t]he message [from the promotional material] is unmistakable: MB’s forest practices are ‘sustainable’; left to the company, the forest will be renewed, if not improved, for future generations” (9). This “message” is one that is echoed verbatim through Levant’s book *Ethical Oil*, as well as CAPP’s promotional campaigns that centre on their reclamation projects. The connection with *Ethical Oil*, as well as other tar sands-related campaigns like *Oil Sands Today*, is not unfounded; both Braun’s analysis and my own speak to a larger dynamic in natural resource politics (forestry, petro-, and so on): *representation*. As a result of the significance of representation, *signification* also becomes a crucial aspect in the discussion, raising questions regarding what entities have the power and resources to alter popular signification of terminology.

Significantly, and also unsurprisingly, the promotional efforts of Levant, *Ethical Oil*, and CAPP hinge on the manners in which they construct their discourse through *ambiguous* diction and, for lack of a better term, “buzz” words. Indeed, they use words that are conventionally understood to be ambiguous—particularly “sustainability,” which is a term that, as this thesis illustrates, does not have a uniform definition, especially when used in reference to capitalist business practices. These efforts seek to reconcile the need for ecologically sustainable practices with, on a smaller scale, the contemporary practices of natural resource extraction and, on a larger scale, the orders and processes of capitalism. Foster, Clark, and York point out that “[o]nce the notion of ‘green capitalism’ is accepted—as if capitalism was not a system of self-

expanding value, or that endless accumulation was somehow compatible with environmental sustainability—the environmental problem becomes merely a question of *management and markets*” (29-30, emphasis added). This is an astute observation and, coupled with the promotional/pseudo-grassroots campaigns considered in the chapter, marks the ways in which they, and Ethical Oil in particular, function as doubly post-environmentalist, attempting to reconcile unfettered resource extraction and unfettered capital accumulation with ecological sustainability. Moreover, Ethical Oil and CAPP problematically work on the assumption that “green capitalism” or “eco-capitalism” *is* conventionally accepted.

This chapter marks the most overt and arguably violent instances of post-environmentalism on a number of levels. The notion that oil and fossil fuels can be developed sustainably is in many ways problematic. By definition, it is a non-renewable resource and therefore will *eventually* be used up, which is *de facto* unsustainable. To promote the mining of bitumen as sustainable or somehow environmentally friendly, as Levant and CAPP do, then, is not only grossly misleading and misinformative, but also has effects on the signification of the concept of sustainability. For example, CAPP proposes that its

mission is to enhance the *economic* sustainability of the Canadian upstream petroleum industry in a safe and environmentally and socially responsible manner, through constructive engagement and communication with governments, the public and stakeholders in the communities in which we operate. (“CAPP’s Mission,” emphasis added)

Here, CAPP constructs the dialogue of its business philosophy quite carefully; by prefacing “sustainability” with “economic,” it avoids the accusation that it is suggesting that oil development *can* be sustainable, but it is still implementing the terminology. Indeed, economic

sustainability is in some ways a platitude—it simply suggests that they will find ways to continually derive profits. Furthermore, Levant’s book, CAPP’s use of Patrick Moore, and the Ethical Oil campaign are *actively* working against environmentalist groups and individuals while appropriating their discourse, whereas previous chapters in this thesis exhibit a more passive, but equally damaging, approach to their appropriation. Ethical Oil relies on commodity fetishism and simulated grassroots politics, while CAPP’s approach to land reclamation reveals the logic of post-environmentalism *par excellence*. To a measurable degree, both suggest that natural resource extraction can carry on with its conventional practices, and technology will work to effectively “undo” its ecological damages. While this suggests that there are degrees of post-environmentalism, which this thesis reflects, it also reveals both the nuances and *larger* attributes of post-environmentalism, particularly the paradoxical notion that ecological damage can be “undone” through the consumption of the “right” commodities: soda in plant-based bottles, a hybrid automobile, and Canadian tar sands oil.

The socio-political ramifications of such campaigns as Ethical Oil, which effectively blur the distinction between grassroots activism and capitalist promotion/advertising are quite significant. A campaign such as Ethical Oil, in terms of popular discourse and representation, effectively functions to depoliticize grassroots activism. Without such necessary political distinctions, consumption becomes an ideology in and of itself, and corporate entities promise that their consumption will result in an enactment or representation of their own ideological beliefs; Žižek identifies consumption as ideology when he describes the functions of contemporary postmodern capitalism: “the very act of participating in consumerist activity is simultaneously presented as participation in the struggle against the evils ultimately caused by capitalist consumerism” (*End Times* 356). This tautology is precisely the current situation of

contemporary postmodern capitalism; contained within it is the suggestion that both capitalism and consumption are effectively naturalized into hegemonic consciousness as both systems absorb critiques in a superficial manner that functions *de facto* to quell any challenges that may arise against their own hegemony (ethical, political, and so on). What emerges here is a system that *is* beyond ideology, but not in Francis Fukuyama or Guy Sorman's post-ideological sense. Instead, contemporary postmodern capitalism is beyond ideology in a more Baudrillardian sense—it is *hyper-ideology*. Moreover, since it operates within a system of simulacra and simulation, it nullifies categories of radical politics, including most prominently in this context environmentalism, which seek to disrupt capitalism's hegemonic hold on political discourse and political reality. In the context of environmental politics, these efforts and their effects can be observed in pseudo-grassroots campaigns such as Ethical Oil.

Conclusion

The Corporate Apparatus and Post-Environmentalism: Consumer-Subjects, Ethical

Consumption, and the (Im)Possible Future of Radical Politics

In the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity, and no one can keep his or her subjectness secure without perpetually resuscitating, resurrecting and replenishing the capacities expected and required of a sellable commodity.

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, *CONSUMING LIFE*

A society dominated by such non-material meanings (abstract value) encourages economic and environmental waste, a throwaway culture, a fashion cycle extending to more and more commodities, and so forth.

JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER, BRETT CLARK, AND RICHARD YORK, *THE ECOLOGICAL RIFT*

While they examine the ramifications of consumer society, promotional culture, and the pervasiveness of commodification through differing perspectives in the epigraphs above—Bauman from a more traditional, Marxist sociology and Foster, Clark, and York from an eco-Marxist sociology of sorts—one may note that both point towards similar phenomena: the ways in which consumer culture and the promotional “sphere” relegate, shape, and ultimately *construct* contemporary social existence. Bauman highlights the notion that human subjects now only exist through, and as, commodities, while Foster, Clark, and York extend this logic by illustrating the ideological and ecological effects of promotional culture’s relentless pursuit to infuse commodities with abstract and symbolic values. These arguments function as extensions of Baudrillard’s line of thought made in *The System of Objects*. Moreover, while Bauman, Foster, Clark, and York identify the background workings of the contemporary socio-political situation, they also allude to the mechanics of ideology. Indeed, their observations are astute, but in some ways they gloss over how these contexts function on an ideological level so banal that their pervasiveness seems largely unnoticed and unacknowledged. This lack of

acknowledgement, however, is almost a necessity in the functioning of contemporary postmodern capitalism and promotional culture as it becomes instrumental in establishing post-environmentalism, post-feminism, and other “re-packaged,” paradoxical appropriations of hegemony-challenging ideologies. In contemporary postmodern capitalism, political and ethical consciousness is constructed and perpetuated in terms of concepts that only exist within a consumer sphere, which has particularly grave ramifications for environmental political consciousness and radical politics in general.

Pushing Bauman’s observations about the consumer-subject further, politics and ethics, along with subjectness, are also relegated to and constricted within the consumer sphere. Here, one can imagine a re-tooling of Derrida’s oft-cited adage that “there is nothing outside of the text” (1992) as “there is nothing outside of the corporate.” The implication here, then, is an answer to the question posed by Mark Fisher’s subtitle to *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative*, which asks whether or not there exists an alternative to capitalism in the public consciousness. The answer is a resounding “no.” My analysis of post-environmentalism through postmodern capitalism illustrates and exposes the ways in which social and political movements are vulnerable on multiple levels to co-optation from larger, hegemonic antagonistic systems and further, how that co-optation is largely an issue of representation and semantics. This raises further questions as to who, or what, has the means by which to construct and disseminate representation as such. Derrida and, more recently, Timothy Morton among other critics, remind us that nature, as human beings understand and experience it, is a linguistic or cultural construction.¹ Guattari highlights this discursive stronghold in his discussion of ecosophy and what he labels as Integrated World Capitalism:

¹ Anthony Vital expresses this notion quite aptly in an article entitled “Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and ‘Life & Times of Michael K’” when he argues that in ecocritical practice it is

Post-industrial capitalism, which I prefer to describe as *Integrated World Capitalism* (IWC), tends increasingly to decentre its sites of power, moving away from structures, producing goods and services towards structures producing signs, syntax and—in particular, through the control which it exercises over the media, advertising, opinion polls, etc.—subjectivity. (32)

Guattari's point here is on the one hand to expose the ways in which contemporary postmodern capitalism controls social and cultural spheres, and on the other, to emphasize the significance of representation and who, or what, has *control* over systems of signification. Indeed, if “nature” as such, following Derrida and Morton, is to be understood as *largely* discursive—that is, always mediated through and constructed by language—then its construction and dissemination relies on signification; with the inarguable pervasiveness of mass media, as well as the corporate control over it, it is clear what institutions have the means to construct mass signification of “nature.” Post-environmentalism fits into a larger phenomenon of what Fisher labels “capitalist realism;” it is a specific instance where a hegemony-challenging politics is co-opted and paradoxically “undone,” and capitalism is reaffirmed as the (supposedly) only viable system in which to live.

The three chapters that comprise this thesis examine manifestations of post-environmentalism by focusing on promotional campaigns from three industries that are increasingly more environmentally damaging by default: household commodities, personal automobiles, and the Alberta tar sands. Thus, the arguments in each chapter can be viewed both holistically as well as individually in their illustrations of the semiotic intricacies of post-environmentalism. In this sense, the thesis structurally illustrates both the nuanced aspects of

necessary to “[take] into account ... the complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and *how language both shapes and reveals such interactions*” (90, emphasis added). Vital is clearly informed by poststructuralist thought here; while he does not discount the idea that a natural world exists *outside* of language, he points out the dynamic qualities of nature's “existence” through human interaction.

post-environmentalism—which, as the present arguments demonstrate, are largely dependent on the *type* of commodity being promoted and its associated detrimental environmental impacts—as well as the more uniform qualities of post-environmentalism. These uniform qualities are the most visible ones in post-environmentalism and thus are the ones which constitute post-environmentalism. For example, one of the most consistent notions expressed throughout the promotional campaigns, aside from the base notion that consuming the “right” commodities will counteract and nullify the ecological damages that have historically accrued, is what Andrew Wernick terms the “technology complex.” Although Wernick’s focus when developing his notion of the “technology complex,” as Chapter Two illustrates, is on automobile advertising, its connections to other types of technology like computers, and its signification of larger notions of modernity (69-72), this complex is also a fundamental aspect of the discourse of post-environmentalism. Foster and his co-authors correlate this reliance on the rhetoric of technology in framing the solutions to environmental crises when they point out that the “standard way in which to square the expanding circle (or spiral) of capitalist production is to bring in the black box of technology as constituting the solution to all problems” (42). The “technology complex” then provides the rhetorical fodder for corporations from Coca-Cola to Suncor to construct a message that individuals need not significantly alter their consumption practices and industry need not drastically alter its production practices.

Although my analysis of manifestations of post-environmentalism is by no means exhaustive, this thesis examines and interrogates, through a *survey* of promotional campaigns, widely dispersed phenomena that have very tangible socio-political effects, not the least of which is an active, arguably relentless undermining of basic tenets of environmentalism by utilizing environmentalist discourse as a means to promote consumption. Post-environmentalism builds

on the mechanisms similar to the corporate appropriation of feminism which seeks “to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force” (McRobbie 255). Further, with the use of Žižek’s observation that “eco-capitalism” is hegemonic as a premise (*Tragedy* 34), this thesis highlights that the most explicit and damaging form of contemporary postmodern capitalism’s relentless appropriation is at work in the realm of the ecological. Certainly, as the quotation from McRobbie immediately suggests, these appropriations are not exclusive to environmentalist discourse; it is as though any form of politics, especially counter-hegemonic ones such as feminism and environmentalism, is at risk of co-optation. Take, for example, an advertisement from Miracle Whip, a mayonnaise-type sauce made by Kraft, which attempts to promote its product by stating that Miracle Whip will “not be quiet. We will not try to blend in ... we’re not like the others ... and we will not tone it down” (“Miracle Whip”). There are here clear elements of what Thomas Frank identifies as “hip consumerism,” which is ultimately an appropriation of what Frank labels counterculture—movements that subvert normalization or hegemony (6-7).² Semiotically, Miracle Whip’s paradoxical use of individualist discourse to promote a mass-produced commodity parallels and illuminates the post-environmentalist strategy of appropriating certain aspects of environmentalist discourse for the purposes of promoting the consumption of a specific commodity.

² Frank elaborates on his analysis and observations by stating that “from its very beginnings down to the present, business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that’s seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation’s corporate sponsors” (7, emphasis added). Moreover, he identifies the aims of his work: “This book is a study of *co-optation* rather than counterculture, an analysis of the forces and logic that made rebel youth cultures so attractive to corporate decision-makers rather than a study of those cultures themselves” (7, emphasis added). In this sense, Frank’s approach is structurally similar to mine throughout the thesis, but I argue that post-environmentalism is a more violent extension of the logic of “hip consumerism” that Frank puts forward. While some of Frank’s diction is colloquial, it makes some significant observations regarding the functioning of co-optation in contemporary media and postmodern capitalism.

However, the implications of Miracle Whip's pandering to "individuals" seem comparatively marginal when placed next to the socio-political implications and ramifications of post-environmentalism—the most apparent and troubling of these ramifications being a semantic and commodified shift in what constitutes environmentally ethical behaviour, an active undermining of hegemony-challenging politics. This difference in scale is what separates post-environmentalism from "trends" in mass culture, advertising, and anti-advertising that critics like Frank point out. Furthermore, it is important to extend the discussion of post-environmentalism to its larger socio-political implications. Certainly, my thesis inquires into the intricate workings of post-environmentalism, which is reflected in its title; post-environmentalism is both a form of "sustainable appropriation" as such while "sustainable appropriation" also alludes to postmodern capitalism's endless, "sustainable" ability to appropriate. Žižek captures the ideological paradoxes of contemporary postmodern capitalism:

The new ethos of global responsibility is thus able to put capitalism to work as the most efficient instrument of the common good. The basic ideological *dispositif* of capitalism—we can call it "instrumental reason," "technological exploitation," "individualist greed," or whatever we like—is separated from its concrete socio-economic conditions (capitalist relations of production) and conceived of as an autonomous life or "existential" attitude which should (and can) be overcome by a new more "spiritual" outlook, *leaving these very capitalist relations intact*. (*Tragedy* 35, author's emphasis)

These manifestations of capitalism are wrought with paradoxes that function to undermine the very political discourses being appropriated. Žižek points out almost Baudrillardian, hyper-ideological qualities of so-called ethical capitalism and what it promotes through the media, ethical consumption. Ethical consumption, arguably the consumer by-product of ethical

capitalism, functions as a form of alienation and, further, as an enactment of the logic of commodity fetishism. It can be conceived of as a hyperbolic extension of Žižek's arguments that "people no longer believe, but the things themselves believe for them" (*Sublime* 34). A revised formula would read, "They no longer act, but the things themselves act for them." What occurs, then, is a commodification of politics and ethics, including environmental politics and ethics.

Moreover, post-environmentalism and broader ethical capitalism obscure the situational contexts of current environmental crises, particularly with their focus on *individual* action.

In a 2011 interview, Mark Fisher spoke of recycling's extension of this obscuration:

Isn't recycling a classic case of: 'We assume responsibility for the systemic tendencies of capitalism'? It's not really our fault that there is an environmental catastrophe. The thing is nobody's fault, you can say, in a genuine sense, but that is the problem – because there is no agent capable of acting. There's no agent at the moment that's capable of taking responsibility for a problem on the scale of the environmental catastrophe that we're facing. Instead, it's contracted out to us as individuals as if we could do anything about it by simply putting plastic in the right bin. That won't solve the environmental catastrophe that we're up against. ("Capitalist Realism")

Here, Fisher highlights how the responsibility, for lack of a better term, is placed onto the individual in a system that conceives of environmental issues as only being solved through economic or market-based solutions, regardless of how apt these beliefs are. Furthermore, Fisher points out in the same interview that "[t]he scale of what we're up against is obfuscated by a focus on the ethical" ("Capitalist Realism"). While Fisher is not necessarily suggesting that a focus on ethics is negative, he is pointing out that contemporary capitalism's focus on the ethical creates a socio-political context wherein larger, hierarchical ideological structures and systems

are left unscathed. Indeed, the hegemonic systems that continue to remain unchallenged are in many ways irreconcilable with the aims of most environmentalist politics and ethics; suggesting that corporations simply need an injection of ethics of sorts, as Fisher argues, displaces a focus that could provide the foundation for a critique of larger, systemic reasons, for example, environmental issues. This is precisely what occurs in post-environmentalism, as this thesis claims: it selectively appropriates portions of environmentalist discourse—a discourse which implicitly and explicitly critiques hegemonic production and consumption—to promote consumption and consumerism in general. In doing so, post-environmentalism undermines environmentalism, and also displaces criticisms in a manner similar to Fisher’s arguments above.

It is important here to point out that the future of radical politics, including environmentalism, which seek to actively challenge hegemony, is not wholly bleak. Nor am I attempting in my analyses to advocate a politically pessimistic viewpoint. Certainly, the arguments and observations made throughout this thesis *do* point towards a socio-political condition which, quite easily and understandably, opens intellectual doors to susceptibility and cynicism or, at worst, nihilism. Indeed, postmodern capitalism’s seemingly unfaltering ability to commodify and undermine its ideological challengers through *depoliticization* is evidence that politics and ethics which seek to work outside of, and contra to, contemporary capitalism are becoming increasingly threatened. As radical politics continue to be amalgamated into consumer culture, this co-optation ultimately suggests that there are no politics *outside* of capitalism. In his 2005 book *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, which examines, among other movements, the anti-globalization movement through a politically engaged poststructuralist lens, Richard J.F. Day argues that more recent radical movements tend to function *outside* of and parallel to hegemonic structures. Day elaborates on aims of the

“newest social movements” which work against “the assumption that effective social change can only be achieved simultaneously and *en masse*, across an entire national or supranational space” (8). He continues: “What is most interesting about contemporary radical activism is that some groups are breaking out of this trap by operating *non*-hegemonically rather than *counter*-hegemonically ” (8). Such an argument helps situate radical movements in a context that provides a foundation for optimism; while radical politics are certainly being threatened by appropriation and co-optation, if they function *outside* of the traps of hegemony without the immediate goals of establishing their own *counter*-hegemony, but rather focus on destabilizing or disrupting “dominant structures” (4), then such a threat is not immediately dangerous. However, while there is room for optimism, the threats of contemporary postmodern capitalism on radical politics should not be underestimated.

Contemporary postmodern capitalism—despite Alain Badiou’s arguments that capitalism continues to function in the same manner as it has since its inception—functions as hyper-ideological, framing itself as an ideological *tabula rasa* as it gnaws away its challengers with postmodern teeth. However, there is, as Day points out, room for resistance and subversion outside of the confines of hegemony. In response to the semantic domination and sustainable appropriations of environmentalism and other radical politics, a counter-discourse must be developed. Building a political lexicon and ultimately contributing to a broader political literacy is, on one level, a larger aim of this project. Indeed, another aim of the project outside of its immediate arguments, but still integral to those arguments, is to express the necessity for institutionalized schools of thought that assume a certain level of politicization to engage with radical, hegemony-challenging politics. In the context of ecocriticism, some of its critics, such

as Greta Gaard, point out the political sterilization ecocriticism continues to face;³ this thesis is a direct response to such warnings, illustrating that this political engagement is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. The systems and institutions that construct and perpetuate the ideological context in which promotional and consumerist cultures thrive must be challenged. To shift back to the *Pet Sematary* metaphor expressed in the introduction of this thesis, it is significant that the first step Louis takes when addressing and coming to terms with the reanimation of his family's household cat, Church, is to *identify* his uncanniness —identifying that he is both markedly the *same* as before being buried as well as essentially different. This metaphor proves illustrative in the context of post-environmentalism, a concept which marks environmentalism's own burial in King's *Pet Sematary* and its subsequent reanimation that lacks its previous, constitutive political essence. By finding or constructing the language to express the inability for capitalism to reconcile with environmentalism, which post-environmentalism attempts to accomplish, the first steps to dismantling contemporary postmodern capitalism's stronghold are taken towards much-needed political literacy.

³ In her 2010 article "New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism," Gaard points out that in more mainstream ecocritical works, there is an effective "silencing" of feminist voices. Discussing postcolonial ecocriticism and its overlaps with the critical aims of ecofeminism and environmental justice, and the lack of engagement between the fields, Gaard states,

One would think that ... activists in these fields would see one another as allies, since ecofeminist values oppose all forms of hierarchy and domination, and environmental justice is a movement challenging the continued colonization of nature and marginalized humans, and powered by women at the grassroots, though its theory was initially articulated by men in leadership or in academe. (647-8)

Gaard illustrates here a situation where politicized academic voices in the environmental justice movement manifested into a critico-political praxis, rather than remaining static in academe. Certainly, her use of "though" highlights the fact that since ecocriticism's articulation was originally academic and institutionalized, its political legacy persevered. In this sense, her discussion can be viewed as a "warning" of academic disciplines against either becoming or remaining politically sterile.

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